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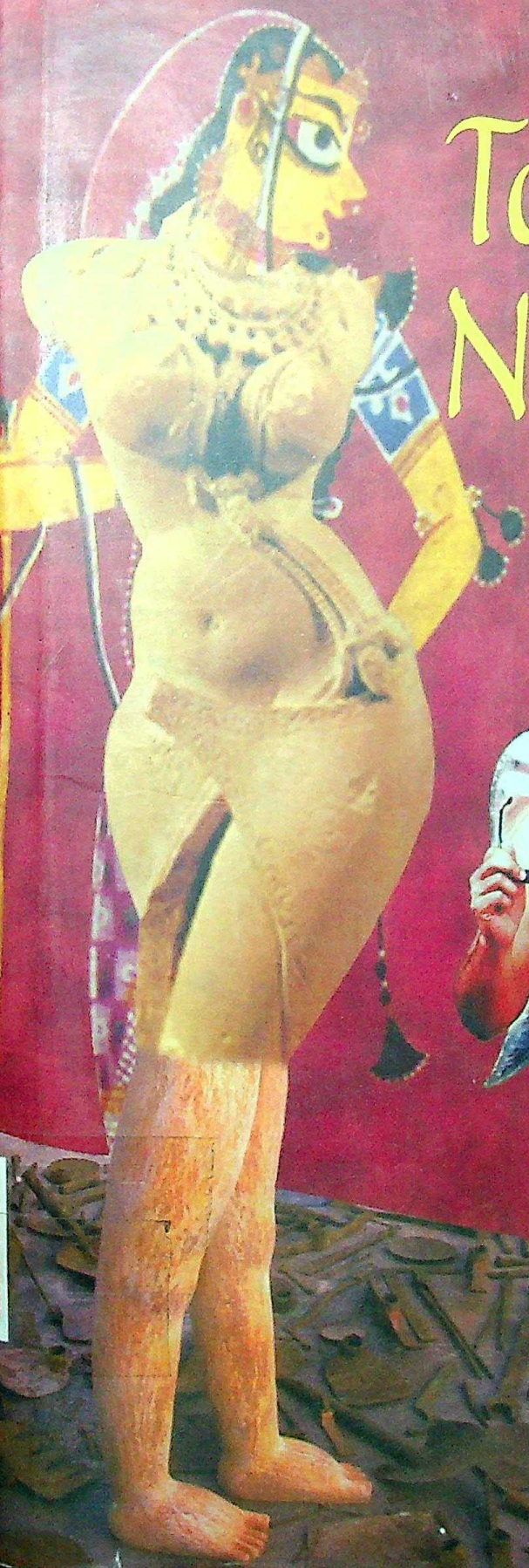
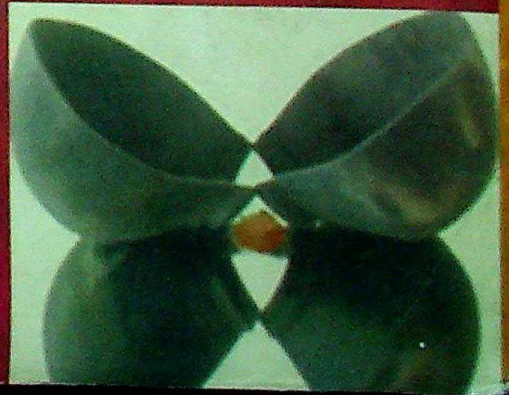
ESSAYS PRESENTED IN HONOUR OF
PROF. RATAN PARIMOO

# Towards a New Art History:

## Studies in Indian Art



*Edited by:*
Shivaji K Panikkar
Parul Dave Mukherji
Deeptha Achar



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# Towards A New Art History:
## Studies in Indian Art

Panikkar
Mukherji

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# Towards A New Art History

## Studies in Indian Art

(Essays presented in honour of Prof. Ratan Parimoo)

135371

*Edited by*
Shivaji K Panikkar
Parul Dave Mukherji
Deeptha Achar

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# Acknowledgements

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We thank Ratan Parimoo whose carefully structured inaugural remarks helped set the tone of the Seminar. We are grateful to Geeta Kapur who took time off from her hectic schedule to be present throughout the Seminar. Her seminal paper "Art Practice, Theory, Visual Culture — The Limits of Disciplinary Crossovers" as well as her interventions crucially shaped the discussions at the Seminar. Our gratitude to Women's Studies Research Centre of Maharaja Sayajirao University whose generosity enabled her participation in the Seminar.

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Karni Singh Jasol (Assistant Curator) of Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur, for the timely help in sending us the visual of *Pl.* 32 of the volume in time.

Finally, we have substantially benefited from comments and suggestions by M.T. Ansari, Santosh Dash, Asma Rasheed and Susie Tharu, particularly on the Introduction.

**Editors**

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# Contents

*Acknowledgements* v

*Contributors* xi

*List of Plates* xv

Prof. Ratan Parimoo: A Journey in Art History 1
***Shivaji K Panikkar***

Research Publications of Prof. Ratan Parimoo 7

From Iconography through Iconology to New Art History 15
***Ratan Parimoo***

Introduction: Towards New Art History 47
***Deeptha Achar***
***Parul Dave Mukherji***
***Shivaji K Panikkar***

**PART I**

**QUEST FOR NEW FRAMEWORKS**

1. Visual Culture in an Indian Metropolis 69
***Geeta Kapur***
***Ashish Rajadhyaksha***

2. Contemporary Art, Issues of Praxis and Art-Collaboration: Interventions in Bastar 88
***Navjot Altaf***

3. Art History and Art Practice Today: A Question of Interface 99
***Anshuman Das Gupta***

4. Reading the Regional Through Internationalism and Nativism: The Case of Art in Madras; 1950 to 1970 105
***Shivaji K Panikkar***

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5. Rethinking Gender Issues in Indian Art 122
*Parul Dave Mukherji*

**PART II**

**PATRONAGE IN QUESTION**

6. Technique, Time and Form in Ancient Indian Terracotta Sculptures 133
*Baishali Ghosh*

7. The Socio-Economics of Art in the *Śilpa Śāstra*s 142
*Vaijayanti Shete*

8. Roda Temples: Edifice of Spiritualism or Political Advertisement? 153
*Jayaram Poduval*

9. Methodological Crisis in the Studies of Indian Painting: The Case of the Mewar School 159
*Shailendra Kushwaha*

10. The Poetics and Politics of Citation in Jodhpur Miniatures 165
*Debra Diamond*

11. Miracles in the Park: The Design and Politics of a Contemporary Religious Space in Bangalore 173
*Annapurna Garimella*

**PART III**

**CITING FORMALISM AND ICONOGRAPHY**

12. History as Allegory: The Bhaja Narratives 189
*Deepak Kannal*

13. The 'Subjectivist Turn' in Indian Temple Architecture 194
*Ajay Sinha*

14. Guilds as Determinants of Style: Shamalaji Sculptures 201
*Abha Sheth*

15. Intertextuality, Authorship and the Conundrum of Interpretation in the *Sūrsāgar* Paintings of Mewar 211
*Rita Sodha*

16. Body and Transcendence: Representations of Two Contemporary Women Artists 221
*Shubhalakshmi Shukla*

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17. The 'Madras Art Movement' and the Lineages of Abstraction 229
*Ashrafi Bhagat*

18. The Female Body Problematized: The Paintings of T.K. Padmini 243
*Savithri Rajeevan*

**PART IV**

**AT THE EDGE OF THE DISCIPLINE**

19. The Contours of the Androgynous Body: Deciphering the Sarnath Buddha Image Type 253
*Sugata Ray*

20. The New Antiquity of 'Tamil' Temples: Constructing Identities through Architecture 265
*Shriya Sridharan*

21. On Signature and Citizenship: Further notes on the 'Husain Affair' 276
*Karin Zitzewitz*

22. Subalternism in the Studies of Indian Art: An Argument Concerning Dushadh 'Madhubani' Paintings 288
*Meena Singh*

23. Identity, Discourse and Hybridity: An Analysis of MTV Imagery 294
*Vellachi Ramanathan*

24. *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī*: Meaning and Excess in Contemporary Public Culture 305
*Madhuvanti Anantharajan*

25. Windowed Style of the Desktop Interface, Web Narrativity and the Indian Theories of Meaning 311
*Nandini Gandhi*

**PART V**

**INSTITUTIONAL SITES OF 'INDIAN' ART**

26. Museums and the Making of the Indian Art Historical Canon 333
*Kavita Singh*

27. What Makes for the 'Authentic' Female Nude in Indian Art? 358
*Tapati Guha-Thakurta*

28. Crafting Education: Caste, Work and the Wardha Resolution of 1937 385
*Deeptha Achar*

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29. Re-Membering Indian Art: Plotting Journeys through Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses 394
*Rahul Bhattacharya*

30. National Gallery of Modern Art: Museums and the Making of National Art 400
*Vidya Shivadas*

31. Constructing A Museological Paradigm of Living Cultures: The Making of the South Asia Gallery at the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore 410
*Gauri Parimoo Krishnan*

32. The Photograph on a Rowdysheet 426
*R Srivatsan*

*Plates* 435

*Index* 479

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# Contributors

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**Kavita Singh** teaches at School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was Guest Curator at the San Diego Museum of Art where she worked with the Edwin Binney III collection of Indian paintings and has been a Henry Luce Intern at the Asia Society Galleries in New York. She has also been Research Editor, Marg Publications. At present, she is working on the history of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and its reflection of changing appraisals of Indian art. Her other research interests include Sikh and late Mughal painting.

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**R. Srivatsan** is an independent scholar. He is the author of *Conditions of Visibility: Writings on Photography in Contemporary India*. His writings have appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Public Culture*. He is currently researching on development issues and Indian nationalism.

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# List of Plates

1. Raghubir Singh, From Bombay: Gateway to India, *Office Worker Leaves Home, Dharavi*, 1992. Photograph, 63.5 × 85 cms, Collection: Estate of Raghubir Singh.
2. Sudhir Patwardhan, *Fall*, 1998. Oil on canvas, 152.4 × 106.7 cms. Collection: Virginia and Ravi Akhoury.
3. Atul Dodiya, *Missing*, 2000. Enamel paint on metal roller shutters and laminate boards, three shutters each 233.7 × 167.6 on 274.5 × 183 cms. Collection Nitin Bhayana.
4. Navjot Altaf, *Between Memory and History*, 2001. (First shown at the Tate Modern, 2001; view of the work re-installed with variations and extensions at Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, 2001.) Level 1, three video films 'Images of Images and Images in Images', three audios 'Voices of Reflection', steel, paper with text, soft sculpture, LCD projectors, DVD and CD players and headphones. 284 × 1346 × 1067 cms. Level 2, paper with text, string (57 books), photographs, wood. Collection: The artist.
5. Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine*, 2000. (Installation view at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2000; the work re-installed at the Tate Modern, 2001.) Video installation with four LC video projectors, four DVD players, four speakers, two amplifiers, salt, mylar, mirror. Video 20 minutes. Closed room 400 × 600 × 900 cms. Collection: The artist.
6. Pushpamala N., From *Phantom Lady or Kismet: A photoromance by Pushpamala N. Set in Bombay*, 1996-98. Concept, Direction and Performance: Pushpamala N. Photography: Meenal Agarwal. Twenty-two photographs (edition of ten), each 30.5 × 40.6 cms. Collection: Bradford Art Galleries and Museums.
7. Sudarshan Shetty, *Home*, 1998. (Installation view, Tate Modern , 2001.) Paint on fibreglass and wood, stainless steel, 176 × 56 × 270 cms. Collection: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.
8. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with Rajkumar, Shantibai, Gessuram, and Kabiram, *Pilla Gudi*, List of Plates, 2000, Śilpīgrām, Koṇḍagāon, Bastar, cement and iron, 3ft × 18ft × 28ft. *In situ.*
9. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2001, Sambalpur, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft × 15ft × 70ft. *In situ.*
10. *The site before the Naplar Project began*, Bandhapara, Kondagaon, Bastar.
11. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2002,

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Bandhapara, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft (height) × 13ft (diagonally)× 70ft. (drainage). *In situ.*

12. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2002, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft (height) × 15ft (diagonally) × 30ft. (drainage). *In situ.*
13. S. Dhanapal, *Mother and Child*, bronze, 1957. Collection: K.M. Adimoolam, Chennai.
14. K.C.S. Paniker, *The Garden*, oil on board. Collection: National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.
15. K.C.S. Paniker (on the extreme right) showing the batik textiles to the visiters at the batik exhibition, 1963.
16. K. Ramanujam, *Untitled*, drawing, *ca.* 1968.
17. V. Arnawaz, *Drawing*, ink on paper, 1968.
18. *'Ageless' Type of Terracotta Figure*, Mathurā region, Mauryan, *ca.* 320-200 BC
19. *'Ageless' Type of Terracotta Figure*, Śuṅga, *ca.* first century BC.
20. *'Timed' Type of Molded Terracotta Figure*, Bihar, Mauryan, *ca.* 250 BC.
21. *'Timed' Type of Terracotta Plaque, Uttar Pradesh*, Gupta, fifth century AD.
22. *Roda Temple No. 1*, North Gujarat, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.
23. *Roda Temple No. 3 and 5*, North Gujarat, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.
24. *Roda Temple No. 5*, North Gujarat, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.
25. *Kāśī Viśveśvara Temple*, Pattadakkal, Karnataka, Rāṣṭrakūṭa late seventh to early ninth century.
26. *Śikhara*, Rock-cut Temple, Dhamnar, Madhya Pradesh, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, late seventh to early ninth century.
27. Nisarudin, *Māru Rāgiṇī*, Mewar School, AD 1605. Collection: G.K. Kanoria, Calcutta.
28. Manohar, *Rāmāyaṇa — The Scene of Rama Breaking the Bow of Śiva*, Mewar School, AD 1648. Collection: P.W. Museum, Bombay.
29. Manohar, *Rāmāyaṇa — The Scene of Paraśurāma's Anger*, Mewar School, AD 1648. Collection: P.W. Museum, Bombay.
30. Sahibdin, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa — The Scene of Gajendra at the Pool*, Mewar School, AD 1648. Collection: BORI, Poona.
31. Sahibdin, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa — The Scene of Gajendramokṣam — Viṣṇu Kills the Crocodile*, Mewar School, AD 1648. Collection: BORI, Poona.

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32. Amardas Bhatti, folio 17, *Suraj Prakash*, Jodhpur, 1830, opaque water-colour on paper, 121.5 × 45.5 cm. Collection: Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur.

33. *Kṛṣṇa Sporting in the Yamunā*, Bundi, late eighteenth century, opaque water-colour on paper.

34. *Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Gopīes*, Jodhpur, *ca.* 1830, opaque watercolor on paper.

35. *Interior of the Miracle Park of St. Anthony*, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001. Architecture: Anand Prakash, Bangalore. Landscape: Mohan, Bangalore. Photograph: Clare Arni, Bangalore.

36. *Monolith of St. Anthony*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001, Granite, sculptor: School of Ganapathi Stapati, Mahābalipuram. Photograph: Clare Arni, Bangalore.

37. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Standing in the Adultery Miracle Scene*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001. Sculptor: Kutti and Team, Kanyā-Kumārī. Photograph: Clare Arni, Bangalore.

38. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Blessing Dalit Woman in the Park in September 2001*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore. Photograph: Clare Arni, Bangalore.

39. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Blessing Genuflecting Dalit Woman in the Park in September 2001*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore. Photograph: Clare Arni, Bangalore.

40. *Sri Satakarni's Conquest Over Kharavela*, Vihāra no. 19, Bhaja rock cut cave, Maharashtra, right wall of the porch, Sātavāhana, first quarter of second century BC.

41. *Sri Satakarni Identified Allegorically as the Buddhist Hero Mandhata*, Vihāra no. 19, Bhaja rock cut cave, Maharashtra, right wall of the Porch first quarter of second century BC.

42. *Kalleśvara Temple*, west, Kukkanur, northern Karnataka, *ca.* AD 1025.

43. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, view from south-east, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.

44. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, east wall detail, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.

45. *Adam Hardy's Figure 8 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995), partly reproduced also in *JSAH* (December 1996) article as figure 1.

46. *Adam Hardy's Figure 6 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995), reproduced also in *JSAH* article (December 1996) as figure 17.

47. *Adam Hardy's Figure 1 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).

48. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD. Collection: Baroda Musuem and Picture Gallery, Baroda.

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49. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD. Collection: Baroda Musuem and Picture Gallery, Baroda.
50. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Thanesara, Udaipur, Rajasthan, sixth century AD. Collection: Los Angeles County Museum.
51. *Mātṛkā*, Thanesara, Udaipur, Rajasthan, sixth century AD. Collection: National Museum.
52. *Skanda-Kārttikeya*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD. Collection: Baroda Musuem and Picture Gallery, Baroda.
53. *Mātṛkā* with child, Shamalaji Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD, Collection: Baroda Musuem and Picture Gallery, Baroda.
54. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.
55. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.
56. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1710.
57. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1710.
58. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.
59. Nasreen Mohamadi, *Drawing*, Ink on Mount-board, late 1970s, 20 ¼ × 28 ¼ inches, Collection: Altaf & Navjot, Mumbai.
60. Nasreen Mohamadi, *Drawing*, Pencil and Ink on Paper, late 1980s, 19 × 19 inches, Collection: XAL Praxis, Mumbai.
61. Anita Dube, *Trajectory of Piss*, 1995, Wood, Metal, Wheels, 138 × 32 × 52 cms.
62. Anita Dube, *Garlend* — part of *Silence* (*Blood Wedding*) — a 13 piece Installation, 1997, bone, velvet, glass, beads and thread, dimensions variable.
63. K.C.S. Paniker, *Words and Symbols*, 1965, oil on board.
64. L. Munuswamy, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, *ca.* 1980s.
65. K.M. Adimoolam, *The Land I Chose*, oil on canvas, *ca.* 1980s.
66. V. Viswanathan, *Untitled*, mixed medium on canvas, *ca.* 1972.
67. P. Gopinath, *Biomorphic Form*, oil on canvas, *ca.* 1982.
68. Achutan Kudallur, *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 2000.
69. T.K. Padmini, *Woman*, *ca.* 1963, Oil on canvas.
70. T.K. Padmini, *The Body*, *ca.* 1965, oil on canvas.
71. T.K. Padmini, *Woman Listening*, *ca.* 1963, oil on canvas.
72. T.K. Padmini, *Woman and Child*, *ca.* 1964, oil on canvas.

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73. T.K. Padmini, *The Body*, *ca.* 1965, oil on canvas.

74. *Kubera Yakṣa*, Bharhut pillar, Śuṅga, *ca.* early first century BC, Collection: Indian Museum, Calcutta.

75. *Candra Yakṣī*, Bharhut pillar, Śuṅga, *ca.* early first century BC, Collection: Indian Museum, Calcutta.

76. *Bodhisattva*, Sarnath, Kuṣāṇa (inscribed third year of Kaniṣka's reign, AD 81, donated by Bhikku Bala), Collection: Sarnath Museum, Sārnāth.

77. *Standing Buddha*, Sarnath, Gupta, (dated AD 474), Sarnath Museum, Sārnāth.

78. *Standing Buddha*, Mathura, Gupta, *ca.* last quarter of fifth century AD National Museum, New Delhi.

79. *Gopuram*, Gandhi Maṇḍapam, Chennai, 1953.

80. Muthaiya Stapati, *Gopuram of Kāmākṣī Amman Temple*, Chennai 1980s.

81. Muthaiyah Sthapati, *Vimāna of Aṣṭalakṣmī Temple*, Chennai, 1978.

82. P. Sambhandham, *Gopuram of the Ellai Amman Temple*, Besant Nagar Chennai, 1990.

83. *Gaṇa Figure*, Shri Devi Ellaiamman temple, Chennai, 2000.

84. Vishwanathan Sthapati, *Gaṇa Figure*, Varasiddhi Vināyakar temple, Chennai, 1979.

85. *Kṛṣṇa Teasing Gopī*, Madhubanī, Brāhmaṇa and Kāyastha Style, 1999, water-colour on paper, 77 × 57 cm.

86. *Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa*, Madhubanī, Brāhmaṇa and Kāyastha Style, 1999, water-colour on paper, 77 × 57 cm.

87. *The Mythical Hero Rājā Salheśa*, Dusādh Madhubanī Style, 1999, water-colour on paper, 27.5 × 18.5 cm.

88. *Godanā*, Dusadh Madhubanī Style, 1999, water-colour on paper, 21 × 17 cm.

89. *Birds and Dancers*, Dusadh Madhubanī Style, 1999, water-colour on paper, 21 × 17 cm.

90. An MTV image, '*The representation of the relative freedom of women in terms of absence of conflict as in commercial advertisement. . .*'

91. An MTV image, '*. . . bilingual idiosyncrasies and intertextuality is parodied to advertise for their program on classical hits songs called Bar Bar Dekho. . .*'

92. An MTV image, '*Indi pop stars are celebrated and masqueraded in garbs of famous Indian politicians. . .*'

93. An MTV image, '*Indi pop stars are celebrated and masqueraded in garbs of famous Indian politicians. . .*'

94. An MTV image, '*Cyrus Broacha-personifying MTV in India.*

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95. *Saffron Flags in the Visarjan Procession — Gaṇeśa-caturthī Festival*, Pune, 2001.
96. *Lathi Fighting as Part of the Visarjan Procession — Gaṇeśa-caturthī Festival*, Pune, 2001.
97. *Gaṇapati Image on a Dish Antenna*, Baroda, 2001
98. *Gaṇapati as Narasiṁha*, Pune, 2001.
99. *Enactment of a Scene from the Film Gadar Before the Gaṇapati Image*, Baroda, 2001.
100. *Windowed Interface, Fragmented, Multi-sequential. Home Page*, contemporary Art Portal, www.saffronart.com
101. *Web of relationships, Diagram of Causal Chains and Damages Resulting from Forest Destruction and Increase in Erosion.*
102. *Cosmic Pārśvanātha*, Rajasthan, Jodhpur, eighteenth century, Opaque water-colour on cotton 61.6 × 55.9 cm. Collection: Ravi Kumar, New York.
103. *Kitchen Corner in a Traditional Rabari Hut*, Rann of Kucch, contemporary.
104. *Śaṅkhāvali Pati*, a conceptual map of memories, a pilgrim's souvenir, depicting Jagannātha temple and other sacred sites in Purī. Orisa, Purī district, early twentieth century, 62.9 × 78.1 cm. Collection: Chester and David Herwitz.
105. Prema Murthy, Bindigirl, www.thing.net/bindigirl/, 1999.
106. *A Jina, Hindu Deities and Animals*, Rajasthan, Mewar, *c.* 1650-75, Opaque water-colour and gold on paper 95/8 × 18 13/'6 in (24.4 × 22.6 cm). Collection: San Diego Museum of Art Edwin Binney third collection.
107. *Example of a tourist poster invoking 'The Sublime and the Sexual', brought out by Madhya Pradesh Tourism on the occasion of the 'Khajuraho Millennium'.*
108. *Example of a typical photographically amplified image of the erotic sculpture on the walls of the Khajuraho temples — reproduced from Eliky Zannas and Jeanne Auboyer, Khajuraho* (Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960).
109. M.F. Husain, *Sarasvati*, pen and ink drawing, *c.* 1970s (reproduced from a newspaper illustration of 1996).
110. Still of Madhuri Dixit from M.F. Husain's film, *Gaja-Gamini* — reproduced from the book, *The Genesis of Gaja-Gamini*, released on the occasion of the film, 1999.
111. *Yakṣī*, Bharhut railing pillar, Śuṅga, red sandstone, *c.* second century BC Collection: Indian Museum, Calcutta.
112. *The 'Bhūteśvara Yakṣīs' of Mathura*, Kuṣāṇa, red sandstone, *c.* second century BC) — reproduced from Ludwig Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, Paris: Pegasus Press, 1929.

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113. *Example of sensually posed 'Surāsundarīs' on the walls of the Khajuraho temples* — reproduced from Eliky Zannas and Jeanne Auboyer, *Khajuraho*, Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960.

114. *A view of the Chettiar house interior with pillars and doorway to contextualise the theme of 'Home to Temple'*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

115. *A view of the divine vāhana, yali and mayūra in the town section of the 'Home to Temple' theme*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

116. *A view of the 'Medieval India' gallery with the central axis passing through the sandstone gateway of late seventeenth century from Vraja area*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

117. *A view of the 'Medieval India' gallery showing the display of Rājpūt and Mogul textiles and decorative objects*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

118. *A view of the Religion section showing a spout, lion, Bāhubali and Buddha images*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

119. *A view of the Buddhist architecture display with Sāñcī stūpa rendered in the background for contextuality*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

120. *A view of the maṇḍovara display showing a medieval nāgara temple wall with sculptures of Yoginī, Cāmuṇḍā, Apsaras and Dancing Gaṇeśa from Madhya Pradesh*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

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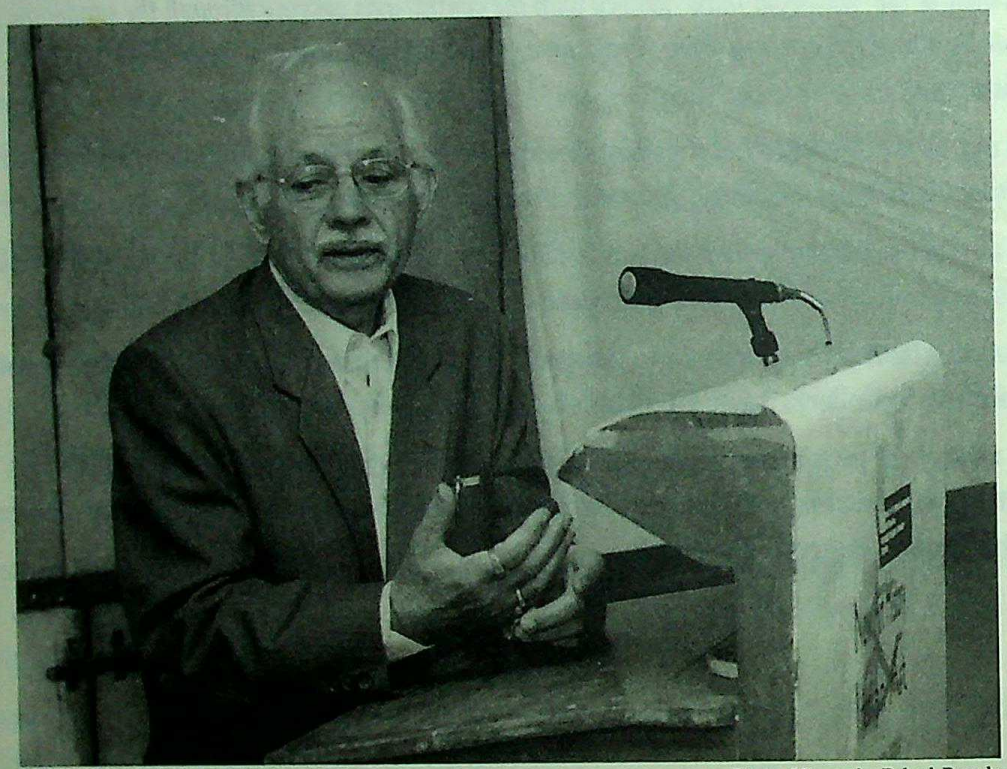

Photo : Himanshu Pahad, Baroda

Prof. Ratan Parimoo giving introductory remarks at the 'New Art History and Indian Art' seminar at Department of Art History and Aesthetics, M.S. University of Baroda, February, 2002.

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# Prof. Ratan Parimoo
# A Journey in Art History

*Shivaji K Panikkar*

Honouring Prof. Ratan Parimoo through a publication carrying critical art historical writings is imagined to be befitting. Concurrently, in more than one way this is also an articulation of a wish that may prove futuristic, that it could be a significant step in rift-bridging, considering the current disciplinary directions of Art History and Art Criticism, which, if not opposed, are perhaps practiced largely unconcerned with one another. Moreover the chosen purpose is only appropriate for the occasion, considering the direction of the research and the pedagogical yearning that Prof. Parimoo has maintained for over the past four decades.

Aptly put, Parimoo's mission within the discipline has been described as that of ". . . a lone warrior." Further on, he has been characterised as one who ". . . somewhat remained isolated from the mainstream." (Ajay Sinha, "Envisioning the Seventies and Eighties," in *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, (ed.) Gulammohammed Sheikh, Tulika, New Delhi, 1997, p. 152.) It had been obvious that in more than one way Parimoo had been an isolated loner in the context of both the general pedantic and hackneyed art historical scenario that is/was present within the country, and the gusto and persuasive temper of contemporary art criticism.

The following quote squarely locates Parimoo's quest within and outside the ideological frameworks that were available for an art historian by choice.

> One accuses him of purism and formalism maintaining a naïve emphasis on western methods. . . . One criticizes him for assuming too easily, or worse, celebrating art history as "an achievement of European scholarship" (Ratan Parimoo (ed.), *Proceedings of workshop in History of Art*, 1977, published on behalf of University Grants Commission, New Delhi, by M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1979.) But he used the European strain to contest a British legacy, and to create displacements in the colonial roots of the discipline while also critiquing the nationalist position. . . . Yet one can not argue that Parimoo was unaware of or naïve about his enterprise. He was more engaged with the *issue of how to formulate a new art history for India* in that

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> context, and he sought to do so within the constraints of the discipline, not by dismissing it *a priori* with a sense of guilt. — *Ibid.*, p. 152, [emphasis added]

Notwithstanding constrains and limitations of the rather dry academic Art History, Prof. Parimoo's contribution to the discipline, both in terms of painstaking research and his teaching pedagogy had indeed been formidable. Furthermore, it is possible to formulate with a hindsight certain methodological frameworks and directions that emerge from them and also of the new directions Indian Art Historical studies have taken through his initiatives.

Perhaps, and understandably to begin with the vision for *a new Art History for India* for Prof. Parimoo was in exceeding the limits set by what was then the established art historical practice and canon — that of the descriptions of iconographers and/or of writing museological and archaeological discoveries and inventories, and/or art history as an appendage to cultural history. Yet, significantly he hardly ever rejected any of these modes as irrelevant in themselves, rather he believed in using all these to the best advantage of the discipline. And, he located his art historical concerns within an inter-space that was made of contemporary art making practice and criticism on one side, and the Museology-Archaeology-Indology-Cultural(Art)-History ensemble on the other — the colonialist and nationalist legacy, that much of the post-independence period Indian art historians took for granted as the natural course to follow. But, for Parimoo, making a distinct space for Art History in its own terms, apart from, and yet connected to all these above areas, is the vision that enabled him in making his dream come true — a space made for Art History in its own right, that which further could move on into critical historical engagements.

The life of Prof. Ratan Parimoo is inseparable from the chronicle of the Faculty of Fine Arts at M.S. University of Baroda. This, more than fifty years old history that holds together varied artistic and ideological trajectories has played a vital role in the making of Prof. Parimoo's intellectual career. His work-profile and the growth of art historical discipline within the Faculty's institutional set-up too are inseparably intertwined. Also, his life-long dedication to the Department of Art History and Aesthetics and to the discipline is exceptional in more than one way.

Having studied creative painting in one of the initial batches of the Faculty, under the guidance of Prof. N.S. Bendre, he was initiated into the world of Art History through the teaching of Prof. V.R. Amberkar and Prof. Markand Bhatt. However, probably intuitively realising of the lack of mental rigour in the Indian art world at that point of time, soon after completing the postgraduate Painting degree in 1957, Parimoo's intellectual quest definitively drew him into the study of historical and aesthetic aspects of world art, in depth. The vantage of a modernist centrally and naturally located him on the international art historical tradition, and, although he began teaching it in 1959 in the Faculty, it is surely his exposure at the Courtauld Institute, London (1963) and subsequently in American universities (1974) that basically molded his methods and approaches.

The founding of a full-fledged Department of Art History and Aesthetics within the organizational

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frame of teaching fine art and art historical curricular programmes for art students on one hand, and devising it as a specialization area on the other, is one of the endeavours Prof. Parimoo and his colleagues had undertaken. Its intellectual presence began to take definitive shape with the introduction of BA, MA and Ph.D. level specialization since mid-1970s. Also, its modest steps into freedom and adventure in research and pedagogy within the national and international art historical context is exemplary in its own right — an accomplishment Parimoo clearly and uncontestedly can claim the larger share of.

Starting his official career from 1966 as the Head of the Department, his uninterrupted engagement with in-depth research and teaching was directed towards fulfilling the mission of making an argument of distinctness for Indian art. For Parimoo, the first and foremost, in research and teaching of Art History had been the object of art itself, its very visual fact and its presence; the very visual impact it holds forth. The centrality that he attached to the visual fact primarily constitutes and thoroughly grounds him in the modernist framework, invoking allegiance to Morellian tradition. Stress on fieldwork and documentation and his relentless efforts in collecting visual documents from diverse sources, and painstakingly classifying and documenting them over the decades have developed into the self-sufficient and extensive "Regional Documentation Centre" (the "archive" as it is called) as the integral part of the Department. The archive today houses reproductions (slides and prints) numbering approximately over a lakh, and several plaster casts of master pieces of Indian and western art and innumerable other documents such as exhibition catalogues, journals and other printed materials. These are made available as ready reference and source materials in teaching, research and study. Further, the credit of creating a separate collection of original Indian art works on display in the Department too goes to Prof. Parimoo's efforts. Put together all these make possible the research, teaching and study of the Art History a virtual journey into all that one can think of as world art.

"Art Historical Methodology and Interpretation and Contemporary Arts and Ideas", is a paper Parimoo introduced at MA level from 1974, which apart from opening-up international research methodology, has been a move forward in opening up the curriculum to critical theory, enabling engagement with conceptual issues in art historical research. His own range of research concerns spanned from ancient to the contemporary art and the flexibility and openness he preserved is exceptional in comparison to the other contemporary art historians and institutions. The art historical method he developed too is composite and went *in tandem* with the demands of classroom teaching. These had a compositeness, since he did not negate any specific approach, including the sociological or contextual, and yet, surely his primary focus remained with formalism and iconology. Understanding the style/formal analysis of Heinrich Wolfflin, Alios Riegl, and Henri Focilon and the content and iconological analysis of Erwin Panofsky and Ernest Gombrich had been centrally important to his pedagogy. Also undoubtedly, the formal analysis and its symbolic significance to

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Indian sculpture as formulated by Stella Kramrisch had been a profound inspirational source for Prof. Parimoo which he earnestly imparted to his students.

His research on Indian art as such began with an inquiry into the artistic diversity of the three Tagores, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath and Rabindranath. This seminal work, apart from being a significant contribution in the direction of making a chronological evolutionary study and comparative analysis of the life and works of the three pioneers, could jeopardize much of the progressive-modernist assumptions about Revivalism. Particularly significant is the fact that Prof. Parimoo considered the works of Abanindranath as eclectic and synthetic and as the first Indian artist to evolve a personal style.

Further, one of the major areas of Prof. Parimoo's research had been on the narrative aspects of Indian visual and literary representations. His research on the sculptural depictions of the life of Buddha, Jātakas, Vaiṣṇavite sculptural and pictorial narratives of *Kṛṣṇa-Līlā*, and of the picture puzzles of *Bihārī Satsai* further took him in the direction of narrative analysis and iconology and their interconnections. Considering the visual narrative as the most characteristic feature of traditional Indian art he arrived at a significant theorization that iconography largely is the result of the process of summarization of the narrative. At one level these look as if the attempt is merely correlating textual descriptions and sculptural or painterly representations. However, the purpose had been of understanding the evolutionary aspect of implied art historical meaning and developing an insight into the logic of visual structuring. Among others, one such is his monograph on the images of Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu, which apart from engaging with the involved symbolism and narrative while considering variations in time and space, also brings out the role of the creative genius of artists.

While organising national and international level conferences such as the "Vaiṣṇavism and Indian Art (1983)," "The Sculpture and Architecture of Ellora Caves (held at the site in 1985)," on the "Art of Ajanta Caves" (1988) and the one on various arts in modern India (1991), Prof. Parimoo's organizational and leadership abilities could be seen manifested fully. The subsequent publications of the proceedings of these as books are going to be valued for the times to come and surely would stand testimony of his commitment and hard work. These conferences apart, bringing different experts into the Department from time to time had been of immense educational value too.

For Prof. Parimoo the search for ever-new directions for research areas is a matter that continues even after the official retirement, and the relentless and painstaking spirit that he embodies is unusual, the latest being the area of renaissance of art in Gujarat. An acknowledgement and a word of gratitude to his dedication and passion to Art History and to his life partner Naina Dalal, and her constant support to him will not be out of place here. And an anecdote: Parimoo, the *karmayogī* in defense of his passionate involvement with work at some occasions has described himself ironically and heroically as a *sirfirā* — a mad-guy. And the journeys continue as he currently engages with re-writing the first research project — *The Three Tagores*.

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## Prof. Ratan Parimoo

| | |
|---|---|
| 1936 | Born in Srinagar, Kashmir |
| 1955 | B.A. (Fine) Painting, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. |
| 1957 | M.A. (Fine) Creative Painting, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. |
| 1957 | Postgraduate Diploma in Museology, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. |
| 1963 | B.A. Hons., History of Art, London University, U.K. |
| 1972 | Ph.D. in Art History, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. |
| 1991-93 | Recipient of Jawaha rlal Nehru Fellowship. |
| Oct. 2002 | Senior Fellowship of Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Dept. of Culture, Govt. of Gujarat. |

**Positions Held**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1959 | Lecturer in Art History, Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1966 | Reader & Head, Department of Art History and Aesthetics, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1978 | Professor in Art History, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1975-81 | Served as Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1987-96 | Coordinator, Specially Assistance Programme of UGC in Art History & Aesthetics, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1966-91 | Twenty five years as Head, Department of Art History & Aesthetics, Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara. |
| 1996 | Retired |

**Awards, Scholarships, Foreign Travels and Major Lectures**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1957-59 | Government of India, Cultural Scholarship for independent work as a Creative Painter under the guidance of Prof. N.S. Bendre. |
| 1960-63 | Commonwealth Scholarship awarded by the British Government to study History of Art at London University. Also visited major art museums in Europe. |
| 1968 | One month's stay and travel in USSR to visit major Art Museums under Indo-Soviet Cultural Programme. |
| 1974 | Six month's stay and travel in the U.S.A. under JD Rockefeller IIIrd Grant to Survey current activities in Art Education, to observe contemporary art |

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developments, and to visit public and private art collections in the United States and Europe. Also participated in a Seminar course in Indian sculpture given by Prof. Stella Kramrisch at Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

1978 Invited to participate in the World Congress of International Society for Education Through Art, 1978, Adelaide, Australia. Read a paper on 'Indigenous Culture and the Function of Art Educator'.

1981 Invited to deliver Dr. Radhakamal Mukherji Memorial Lectures, U.P. State Lalit Kala Akademi.

1981-84 Member, Executive Board, National Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

1982 Member, U.G.C. Panel on Art History/Museology, New Delhi.

1982-86 Elected as Executive Secretary/Treasurer of the Indian Association of Art Historians.

1983 Selected by the U.G.C. as National Lecturer for 1983-84 in the subject of Fine Arts. Delivered lectures at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Vishwabharati, Shantiniketan, Punjab University, Chandigarh, and Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

1987 Member, Central Advisor Board of Museums, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Delhi.

1989 Hindi Sahitya Parishad, Ahmedabad, Lecture on 'Paintings based on Bihāri Sat-sāi'.

1990 Somashekhara Sharma Memorial Lecture, Department of Archaeology, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad.

1991-93 Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship.

1993 May-June, travelled to London, Paris, Berlin under grants from Nehru Trust for Indian Collections, Delhi, British Council and the Government of France and Germany.

1993-95 Member, Advisory Board, History of Science, Ancient Period, Indian National Science Academy, Delhi.

1994-97 Member, UGC Panel for Art History/Fine Arts.

1998-2000 Member, Art Purchase Committee, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

1999 Abanindranath Memorial Lecture, Calcutta, Lectures on Buddhist Art at Singapore.

2000 Lectures on Hindu and Buddhist Iconography at Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore.

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Gaurav Puraskar, Gujarat State, Lalit Kala Akademi.

2002 Member, Board of Management, National Museum Institute of History of Art, Museology, Conservation, New Delhi.

2002 Senior fellowship of Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery through the Department of Culture, Government of Gujarat. Working for a revised critical catalogue of the Museum's collection.

**Research Publications**

BOOKS

1. *Paintings of the Three Tagores, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, Rabindranath — Chronology and Comparative Study* (Ph.D. Thesis), M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1973.
2. *Studies in Modern Indian Art*, Kanak Publications-Books India, New Delhi, 1975.
3. A New Light on its Significance in Indian Sculpture as co-author *Guide to Elephanta* by Shastri, Kanak Publications-Books India, New Delhi, 1978.
4. (ed.) *Proceeding of Workshop in History of Art*, 1977, published on behalf of University Grants Commission, New Delhi, by M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1979.
5. *Life of Buddha in Indian Sculpture*, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1982.
6. *Sculptures of Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu*, M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1983.
7. (ed.) *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Art and Culture*, Books & Books, New Delhi, 1987.
8. (ed.) *Ellora Caves — Sculptures and Architecture*, Books & Books, New Delhi, 1988.
9. (ed.) *The Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1989.
10. (ed.) *The Arts of Ajanta — New Perspective*, Books & Books, New Delhi, 1991.
11. (ed.) *Creative Arts in Modern India*, Books & Books, New Delhi, 1995.
12. *The Pictorial World of Gaganendranath Tagore*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 1995.
13. (ed.) *The Legacy of Raja Ravi Varma — The Painter*, Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust, Baroda, 1998.
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**Art Exhibitions**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1955 onwards | National Exhibitions of Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. |
| 1956-59 | Baroda Group of Artists Exhibitions in Bombay. |

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| | |
|---|---|
| 1958 | First one-man show, Srinagar. |
| 1962 | South Asian Artists, Durham, U.K. |
| 1964, 65 & 75 | Joint shows with wife Naina Dalal, at Bombay, Delhi and I.P.C.L., Baroda. |
| 1972 | Retrospective Exhibition at Delhi, Rabindra Bhavan. |
| 1975 & 76 | Alumni Exhibition, Faculty of Fine Arts Silver Jubilee, Bombay, Baroda. |
| 1973 & 75 | One-man Exhibition at Bombay. |
| 1976 | One-man show in Delhi. |
| 1979 | One-man show in Ahmedabad. |
| 1990 | Organized and Exhibited with EIGHT BARODA ARTISTS, CMC Ltd., New Delhi. |
| 1991-92 | Artists Against Communalism, Delhi. |
| 1992 | Birla Academy of Art, Calcutta, Silver Jubilee Exhibition, West Zone. |
| 1995 | Bharat Bhavan Biennale, Bhopal. |
| 1995 | Tribute to Hussain on 80th Birthday, Aurodhan Gallery, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Delhi. |
| 1996 | Contemporary Indian Painting, Bombay Art Society, Bombay. |
| 1997 | Major Trends in Indian Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. |
| 1999 | March, Retrospective Exhibition (Oils) Mumbai; |
| | December, Retrospective Exhibition (Water Colours), Mumbai. |
| 2000 | January, Retrospective Exhibition, Natarani Theatre of Mallika Sarabhai, Ahmedabad. |
| | September, Retrospective Exhibition, Baroda |
| | November, Retrospective, 2000, Nehru Centre, Mumbai (Group Show). |
| | December, Small Format Exhibition, 2000, San Tache Art Gallery, Mumbai. (Group Show). |
| 2002 | Silver Jubilee Exhibition, Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai |

[Prof. Parimoo's paintings are in prestigious collections such as that of Punjab Museum (Chandigarh), Hermitage (Leningrad), Gujarat Lalit Kala Akademi (Gandhinagar), J&K Academy of Arts & Culture (Srinagar), Air India (Bombay), Sahitya Kala Parishad (New Delhi), National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi), Shyamal Builders (Baroda), Madhavan Nair Foundation (Edapally, Cochi), Welcome Hotel (Baroda), Cymroza Art Gallery (Mumbai).]

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# From Iconography Through Iconology to New Art History*

*Ratan Parimoo*

Organising the teaching of Art History in the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, M.S. University of Baroda has been a challenging intellectual engagement. Although introduced along with an entire range of other Fine Art subjects in the Faculty of Fine Arts since 1950, serious consideration for Art History teaching had begun only in the early 1960s. Recruiting full-time teachers and setting up an autonomous department on the pattern of disciplines established for Painting, Sculpture and Applied Arts was the first step. To begin on those lines was quite ambitious since, Art History and Aesthetics subject's had to be made meaningful for creative artists. At the same time the subjects would have had to develop to specialisation level so as to have a strong impact on the growth of the Art Historical studies in the country. With an experience gained over more than a decade, we took the forthright step of spelling out fresh objectives. For this purpose and also keeping in mind various other Indian universities' teaching of Art History, in 1977 under the auspices of UGC a workshop in teaching and research of History of Art was organized. I had unhesitatingly shown how Indian scholars treated Indian miniature paintings in terms of what can be generalised as "catalogue approach" and the "museum attitude". The latter, I quote, "also prevails in writings on sculpture since the museums seem to feel their main concern to be with the matter pertaining to classification, identification, provenance and date." I may make yet another generalisation, which is the influence of the 'archaeological report' pattern on the writing on art objects. It is least realised that archaeological report is more a record of fieldwork and data obtained and should not serve as a model for art historical writing. Yet much of the available art historical research in India reflected the 'archaeological' and "museum catalogue" approach. The 'discovery' has precedence and the early phases of discoveries still loom large. Another stereotype that emerged was the hunting for "textual correspondences", which would have developed into "iconology". But, as it is, mere jotting down of "textual correspondences" has resulted in leaving the problem of interdependence of 'form' and 'meaning' unexplained.[1]

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In the same context, I put forward that,

> a new breakthrough is necessary not only in the Art Historical research but also in the University courses in Art History. The limitations of the 'discovery' approach, 'archaeological reports' attitude and the 'museum catalogue' exigencies have to be consciously recognized and a student must be made to realise this. They must be made aware that Art History deals with much more than this. This is where the problem of methodology assumes significance. The research requirements from one kind of problem to another may differ but it should be within the realization of the student so that they do not fall in the same stereotype approach with which they may be familiar.

We proposed that, the areas of special concentration should be fairly large, selected from the whole spectrum of Indian Art History, classical and folk, ancient and contemporary. We also aspired to "become part of the main stream of the international discipline of Art History."

Hence the importance of methodology of Art History was spelt thus:

> Amidst the rather chaotic and confused situation in Art History teaching in our country it is imperative to emphasise the importance of Art Historical methodology and its place in any respectable curriculum of Art History specialisation in the same way as Philosophy of History stands for the discipline of History or Sociological Theory for Social Sciences. The Faculty of Fine Arts has experimented with it in its general courses in Art History and has taken the bold step of offering a full paper on the Art Historical Methodology and Contemporary Arts and Ideas in the M.A. (Fine) Art History course. This is essentially to provide a theoretical framework, to inculcate a certain frame of mind in the student in his attitude toward Art History as obtained in the West as well as in India and to contrast the course taken in each case. This is further elaborated by taking into consideration the output of certain art historians as 'models' and to characterise the essence of their approaches. A comprehensive bibliography has been identified, e.g., Thomas Munro's *Evolution in Art*, which traces the various scientific theories of Evolution and in this way parallel theories were developed for studying cyclic epochs in civilization as well as in Art History, and finally identifying what evolution signifies in the History of Art. Henri Focillon's *Life of Forms in Art* is like a treatise on Art History, which is a must for every student and scholar. Hauser's *Philosophy of Art History* gives a good critical discussion of various approaches: formal, psychological, and sociological. Panofsky's famous essay on Iconography and Iconology clarifies the problem of meaning in visual arts but is also a good exposition on the problem of interpretation. He and Gombrich have shown the weakness of a purely iconographic approach which is not only an obstacle in the

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> understanding of an art phenomena but its peculiarity is in considering every artistic period in terms of static immobility. Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception* opens our eyes to the nature of visual representation enabling a better grasp of pictorial narrative. Wolfflin's *Principles of Art History* gives us perceptive tools for visual analysis and for characterisation of style.

The following paper is one of four such critiques from a methodological angle, pointing out possibilities towards New Art History in the studies of Indian Art.[2]

**T.A. Gopinatha Rao and the Beginning of Indian Iconography**

The often-quoted scholar, T.A. Gopinatha Rao, by most Indian archaeologists and art historians while giving iconographical descriptions, hardly realised when he planned, began, and completed his four-part *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, that it was an important step towards the study of Indian Art history. (In the introduction to Volume I, he had mentioned that he had completed most of the work in 1912).[3]

It is interesting that no western, and particularly a British scholar took up this task. Is it because it was the work dealing with the art based on the living religious faith of the colonised people? In the meanwhile, Buddhist iconography began to be studied, which had been a dead religion as far as India was concerned, I give the example of A. Foucher.[4] To my mind it is also a case of "orientalism".

Gopinatha Rao himself lists the predecessors and the circumstances in the context of which he decided to write the *Elements of Hindu Iconography*. He mentions the *Genealogy of the South Indian Gods* by the Danish Missionary of Tranquebar, Ziegenbalg, which had been published in 1715, followed by Edward Moor's *The Hindu Pantheon* with illustrations (1810) and *Studies in Hindu Mythology* by Wilinson, which also incidentally include pictures. While he did not refer to the shortcomings or misunderstandings contained in them, he was all praise for Col. Vans Kennedy who brought out *Ancient and Hindu Mythology* in 1831 which was sympathetically written, defending Hindu views with large number of extracts from *Purāṇa*s and other Hindu scriptural sources. But Gopinatha Rao specially quoted the leading colonial scholar of Eastern and Indian architecture at that time, James Fergusson.[5] Fergusson had observed that there was abundant material to write the history of sculpture with certain seriousness, but with regard to mythology as a branch of enquiry, he felt that it has become entangled and it was extremely difficult to obtain clear ideas. For investigating this subject he recommended the study of architecture and sculpture of the country along with its books. By the latter, he meant the branch of Sanskrit research dealing with mythology and its illustration.

> They require to be studied and confirmed by what is built or carved, which alone can give precision and substance to what is written. . . . The details of the emblems and symbols of the numerous divinities of the pantheon could also be collected. Along with the delineations, by those familiar with such symbols. . . .

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Rao attempted to fulfil the desideratum suggested by Fergusson and initiated the study of Hindu iconography, while Fergusson himself represents a type of scholarship which is a combination of empirical documentation and muddle-headed guesswork. The scholarship revealed in his *Tree and Serpent Worship* (1868)[6] describing the contents of Sanchi and Amaravati *stūpa* reliefs, is an appropriate evidence of the state of scholarship by the colonial scholars, which was incapable of realising the synthesis of "higher" and "lower" or "sophisticated" and 'popular' cultural elements in Indian society as adumbrated in these monuments (see a later essay by Ananda Coomaraswamy, entitled 'Elements of Buddhist Iconography' (1935).[7]

The study of Hindu iconography had to begin by mustering arguments about the worship of iconoplastic images even before the formation of the Buddha image. Although, here it is not central for my purpose to establish the prevalence of image worship during the Vedic period, scholars found it necessary to show that image worship was already a part of the Vedic culture. The debate began when the great Vedic scholar, Max Müller, declared that the religion of the Vedas knows no idols. Another scholar, Bollenson, interpreted some *sūkta*s to imply that the Indians did not merely in imagination assign human forms to their Gods, but also represented them in a "sensible" manner.

Perhaps, Rao did not wish to enter into controversies. Moreover, he did not see his programme as essentially philosophical or primarily religious in nature, although he was writing in connection with image worship. His *Elements of Hindu Iconography* is not an 'orientalistic' work. He did not insist on or propagate some special view of Eastern art or Eastern religion. While mildly criticising the European authors for including here and there a pungent remark about what they considered an uncouth representation or an immoral legend, Rao indirectly indicated the objectives of his study when he further lamented that the European scholars did not care to study either "the symbolism underlying the mythical stories or the meaning of the images illustrating them."

Certainly E.B. Havell's spiritedly written books on Indian art would have also been a source of inspiration, though Rao did not acknowledge so. Havell was the unique colonial art administrator to write enthusiastically about Indian art "to help educated Indians for a better understanding of their own national art. . . ." He further stated that ". . . . one has to endeavour to understand Indian thought and place himself at the Indian point of view" for appreciating Indian art. For his interpretation of the image of 'cosmic dance of Śiva', Havell depended on another like-minded scholar, John Woodroffe's earliest books on Tantra philosophy. Havell was the first to quote the new well-known opening scene from the *Uttara-Rāma-Carita* when Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā are looking at the paintings depicting their years of exile in the forest, as source of information about practice of painting in India in the hoary past. From *Rāmāyaṇa* he located a relevant, elaborate description referring to the beautifully carved wooden pillars of architecture.[8]

Rao started with a simple reaffirmation that image worship in India appears to be very ancient, disagreeing with the claim that it began with the followers of Gautama Buddha who adored their

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master and worshipped him in the form of images on his apotheosis after death. Since Rao was convinced by the evidences of image worship among the Hindus long before the time of Buddha, he cited relevant references from the period of Yāska and Patañjali along with the consistency of *Yoga* with this phenomenon. Patañjali had defined *dhāraṇā* as the process of fixing the mind on some object, well defined in space, while Pāṇini (around sixth century BC) had explained the meaning of *pratikṛti* as "anything made after an original".

How did Rao conceive the book? The term "Elements" in the title enunciates that in a way his aim was not very ambitious but rather modest, yet his methodology was very clear. He began by listing postures of deities and *āyudhas* including their symbolism before describing the deities based on references from *Śilpa* texts as well as Purāṇic myths. Subsequently, he described the relevant deities from different parts of India, depending on the range of his photo documentation.

We may also find it of much interest that it was the same time that R.D. Bhandarkar had also published his book, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious System* (1913),[9] which was the first occasion in tracing the historical development of Hindu cults. Since Rao had already completed most of his material by 1912, it would have been too late for him to respond to Bhandarkar's work. Naturally, the notion of development would be absent or would not be uppermost at that time in Rao's mind. Perhaps, it was an advantage that he was a Sanskritist but not essentially an archaeologist.

The 'ideal' catalogue description listing ornaments, weapons and other attributes of the sculptural images can be seen in the catalogue of India and Pakistan exhibition (held at Royal Academy of Art, London in 1947-48) using information complied by Rao and others since then.[10] But scholars reduced this exercise into a dry and mechanical description. Rao's descriptions do not read so dry. Moreover, he even uses the term 'sculptor' (the maker of the images altogether) while he could not have envisaged how such descriptions would sound mechanical when compiled by lesser scholars. This is why I have once observed that Art History must come out of the "Archaeological Report" and 'Museum Catalogue' approaches.[11] Rao specified, although casually the terms 'mythological meaning' and 'moral aim', but even this was often forgotten by later scholars.

Rao's familiarity with South Indian texts is understandable (viz., *Nālayiradivyaprabandham*), but identifying and locating South Indian textual sources by itself was historically an important step. The discovery of a late text of *Śilparatna* (from Kerala) led him to more authentic and relevant texts; among them was the revelation of the importance of *Pañcarātra* and *Vaikhānasa Āgama* texts for Vaiṣṇava iconography. He realised the place of other Āgamic texts including Śaivāgamas like *Aṅśumadbhedāgama, Suprabhedāgama, Kāmikāgama*, etc.; he has made use of the North Indian texts such as *Bṛhat-Saṁhitā, Viṣṇudharamottara Purāṇa* and *Rūpa-maṇḍana*. The other sources he depended on were *Śrītattvanidhi* and iconographic references from *Matsya Purāṇa*.

It is important to note that *Śilpa* texts for the first time became material for Indian art history not only as representing cultural sources, but also for their relevance for understanding the creative

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process so far as the artists were concerned, and also for the interpretative context of these texts so far as scholars could handle them. However, these texts also required to be periodised, that is to place them in historical times, besides locating their relative importance within a region along with the building and sculpting activities prevalent there. Some studies of this kind are among the post-1950 contribution to studies of textual sources, for example, in Gujarati by Kantilal Sompura, and Madhusudhan Dhaky.[12]

## ŚAIVISM

We have underestimated Gopinatha Rao's contribution, especially, may be noted the comprehensiveness of his material on Śaivism and Śaiva iconography. The classification propounded by him like *aghora mūrtis*, *anugraha mūrtis*, *sukhāsana mūrtis*, *nṛtya mūrtis* and so forth, have been followed by all subsequent scholars. Although he acknowledges the importance of Ananda Coomaraswamy's paper, *Dance of Śiva* (first published in 1911, before it was included in his collection of essays of the same name in 1918)[13] it was Rao who coined the term *nṛtya mūrtis* and also was the first to correlate *Nāṭya Śāstra* material with *nṛtya mūrtis* of Śiva in the Indian sculpture. Coomaraswamy published *The Mirror of Gesture* in 1917, which was based on *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*, a dance text.[14] These precedents were there when Kapila Vatsyayan completed her work, *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* (1968)[15] and when Sivaramamurti embarked upon his *magnum opus*, *Naṭarāja in Art, Thought and Literature*.[16] Through these studies much light was thrown on dance as a subject in Indian sculpture and on the relationship between dance and sculpture, besides dance in itself. These studies revealed yet another source of rich content in Indian art.

While Rao had incorporated Coomaraswamy's paper on *Dance of Śiva* (1911) in his section on *nṛtya-mūrtis*, the latter had acknowledged in a paper of 1920s that Gopinatha Rao had quite rightly affirmed that the so-called Trimūrti of Elephanta caves was essentially a Śaivite image known by the nomenclature, Sadāśiva or Mahādeva, citing references concerning the five heads and corresponding five powers attributed to Śiva.[17] He identified further Śaivite images under this classification. He also discovered textual sources for the eight-headed images of Śiva. This section paved the way for Stella Kramrisch's paper on Śiva Mahādeva at Elephanta (1946) and with the readymade textual sources available, enabled her to create an integrated prose, interweaving form and content.[18]

Her German compatriot, Heinrich Zimmer, in his paper on the same theme only elaborated the philosophical implications, though again in lucid prose. He wrote on Liṅgodbhavamūrti characterising it as the problem of 'expanding form'.[19] His prose was coined in terms of Germanic notions of form and iconography. Prior to him, Gopinatha Rao, had already drawn attention to Śiva as "pillar of fire" and that such a notion had derived from Vedic deity, Agni. Coomaraswamy had also associated Buddha with 'pillar of fire' as delineated in Amaravati reliefs.[20]

The high point in the study of Śaivism and Śaivite images after Sivaramamurti's *Naṭarāja* (1974), was the highly perceptive exhibition mounted by Stella Kramrisch (*Manifestations of Śiva*) in 1981 at

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Philadelphia, culminating with the seminar, *Discourses on Śiva*, the papers of which were edited and published by Michael Meister in the same name (1984).[21] Gopinatha Rao has also referred to *Śatarudrīya* text, which was translated by Sivaramamurti for Śaiva iconography.[22]

135371

VAIṢṆAVISM

Although Gopinatha Rao had already made a distinction between *avatāra* (incarnatory) images and the Viṣṇu images under the nomenclature of *caturviṁśati mūrtyaḥ*, the elaboration of *vibhava* (or *avatāravāda*) and *vyūhavāda* (emanation theory) was the contribution of J.N. Banarjea.

However, certain relevant philosophical and textual sources had been noted by Gopinatha Rao, viz., the *para*-Vāsudeva concept from *Pañcarātrāgama* and the *śakti-mayā vyūha* from *Ahirbudhnya-Saṁhitā*. *Para*-Vāsudeva is conceived as possessing six excellent *guṇa*s, from whom spring three divine beings, viz., Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, each with only two of the six attributes.

Caturmukha Vaikuṇṭha images in Mathurā were not known to Gopinatha Rao, R.C. Kak's catalogue of the S.P. Museum, Srinagar, (1923) referred to this image type from Avantīpur (Kashmir) but did not associate it with the *vyūha* concept.[23] It is a post-Gopinatha Rao discovery which had been incorporated by J.N. Banarjea in his elaborate monograph.[24]

Viśvarūpa images answering among other texts also the *Bhagavad Gītā* description (eleventh canto) discovered in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh were neither available at the time of Gopinatha Rao, nor when J.N. Banarjea wrote their books. A detailed work in Viśvarūpa images has been carried out by T.S. Maxwell since 1970.[25]

Before moving on to the work of subsequent scholars, I may add that the drawing of *āyudha*s, headgears, and gestures used in Hindu and Buddhist iconography with which we are familiar through Sivaramamurti's writings were already drawn by Gopinatha Rao in Part I of his first volume which had a chapter on these attributes.

**Coomaraswamy's *Yakṣa*s**

In spite of Coomaraswamy's immense textual researches he had not developed any theory of iconography. Although the in-depth delving into textual sources is parallel to the methods of Erwin Panofsky, yet, while the German art historian had developed towards 'iconology' and its theoretical exposition, Coomaraswamy had merely hinted at what might be taken as notions of Indian iconography. The leap into the formulation of iconology was missed by Coomaraswamy.

Coomaraswamy's *Yakṣas* (1928-31) is an important contribution to iconological studies. While it has been hailed as a significant book, it has not been recognized as an iconological landmark.[26] Some consider it exemplary of a multidisciplinary approach. However, it must be noted that Coomaraswamy used the methodology of German Vedic scholars of collecting all textual references pertaining to each Vedic deity and then based upon this material, characterise the deity's personality, place in the

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hierarchy and pantheon and pinpoint powers for which the society worshipped him (like, say Hildabrandt's *Vedic Mythology*, and *Bṛhaddevatā*). Another important iconographic work by Coomaraswamy was on *Śrīlakṣmī* subtitled, *Early Indian Iconography* (1930).[27] The work on *Yakṣa* cult has been continued by R.N. Misra, who updated and elaborated it during the 1970s.[28]

**J.N. Banarjea**

Now I shall mention the work of J.N. Banarjea, who published his book *The Development of Hindu Iconography* in 1941 with second enlarged edition in 1956.[29] He formulated the definition of iconography thus, I quote,

> The term 'icon', (icon, Gr. eikon), figure representing a deity, or a saint, in painting, mosaic, sculpture, which is in some way or other associated with the rituals connected with the worship of different divinities.

He added

> but, it must never be lost sight of, that in all these cases, a definite religious character must permeate all such objects, in order that their study and interpretation may come under this branch of knowledge.

He asserted that the above account of the subject will fully prove how it is intimately connected with religion. "In fact it is nothing but the interpretation of the religions of man" he wrote J.N. Banarjea had opened his definition by almost making iconography as a branch of religion. Its association with art was only incidental, but iconography as more of a branch or sub-area of Art History was not existent in his book.

Moreover, a "colonialist" as well as an "orientalist" prejudice occurs right in the first paragraph in revealing his bias against the religious beliefs and icons of tribal and primitive social groups. Banarjea had indirectly expressed that primitive art objects did not come in the purview of iconographic studies, which were fetishistic symbols used for their crude ritualism by undeveloped mankind from which some higher clear-cut conception was missing. It had been said in 1941 and repeated in 1956. A prejudice by western imperialists need not have been indulged in by a scholar of the country which was itself not only a colony but whose culture was also considered lower than the western by the same masters. I think the situation had been corrected by Stella Kramrisch in her book, *The Unknown India* (1968) although her approach was already formulated in her study of terracottas (1939) in which she had distinguished between the 'timeless' and the 'time-bound' types. 'Timeless' forms include Pre-historic, tribal and folk types, which are not bound by historical periods and stylistic changes.[30]

Banarjea's endeavour had been *Development of Hindu Iconography* and in the revised edition he had included a broad outline of the history of the origin and development of the different Brahmanical

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Hindu cults. He further explained that he had incorporated a "brief account of some of the principal cult tenets, in order that groups of images be properly understood." Even in the first edition (1941) conceding how monumental Gopinatha Rao's work was, Banarjea had observed how the development of the individual types had seldom been discussed by him. I think these are necessary prerequisites for the notion of iconology. Subsequent scholars, who have been quoting from both Rao as well as Banarjea, did not realise the shift in the iconographic studies brought by the latter.

I have already referred to the significant additions that Banarjea had made within Vaiṣṇava iconography not known in Gopinatha Rao's time. Another important contribution of Banarjea was concerning the phenomenon of "syncretic icons" representing fusion with Hindu elements.

Writing during 1930s and 1940s, Banarjea, had the advantage of the archaeological sources of information concerning the growth of religious cults including numismatics and inscriptions, which he claimed to be the first to use. He also had the notion of development of religious cults before him and also the notion of development of Indian art history. However, he failed to link the development of Art History; a realisation that was being built up through the art-historical studies of Indian art. We have already noted Kramrisch's importance in this context. That Banarjea did not understand Kramrisch (in spite of both having served as colleagues at the Calcutta University) will have to be taken as a probable assumption. Banarjea had been primarily thinking in the framework of Cultural History, because of the fact that academically his affiliation was with the courses of study in Ancient Indian Culture.

**Hindu or Brahmanical**

It is also pertinent that one should ask the question if 'Hindu' iconography was an appropriate term or not, though I think that it was quite right to have been termed as 'Hindu Iconography' by the pioneer Gopinatha Rao (1914). J.N. Banarjea had also adopted the same term, but at times both 'Hindu' and 'Brahmanical' have been inconsistently used by him, e.g., 'Brahmanical Triad' and 'Brahmanical Hindu Iconography' was repeated in the preface for the second edition (1956). A regional term was used, viz., "South Indian Iconography" by Jouveau Dubreuil.[31] But, Bhattashali used the term Brahmanical, perhaps consciously for the first time in 1928.[32] I think since then the terms Hindu and Brahmanical have been used as alternatives. Significantly, the question is that the term 'Brahmanical' exclusively refers to the *Brāhmaṇa* caste (according to the thinking of some scholars), where as neither Hinduism nor the concerned Gods have been created by the *Brāhmaṇa* caste alone, nor is the worship of these deities restricted to just the same caste. Since the Hindu gods are worshipped by most of the four castes, that is from the highest to the lowest in hierarchy, the term 'Brahmanical' is therefore according to me a complete misnomer and not representing the actual phenomenon. Besides, this term is further being distorted by certain scholars today who refer to *Brāhmaṇa* caste as exploiters. For some scholars the term "Brahmanical" is derived from the notion of *Brahman* the Supreme Spirit, and therefore they do not see any problem in this nomenclature.

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I would agree to the viewpoint of those who see the term "Hindu" as encompassing all the castes and all the levels not only as the present-day phenomenon, but also representing the assimilative character which is noticed even in the Vedic texts, i.e., from that 'assumed' historical period from around the fifth century BC onwards. This is the juncture when as Hinduism was emerging, dissenting religions such as Buddhism and Jainism too began formulating.

If Yakṣa worship (which is essentially at folk level or village-god level) is accepted as the beginning of cult deities used for the ritual of image making and image worship, consequently leading to the formation of Hindu cult status, then the use of the term Brahmanical is irrelevant.

When Coomaraswamy wrote on Śrī Lakṣmī, he added a sub-title 'Early Indian Iconography', perhaps because she belonged to the emerging Hindu, Buddhist and Jain image worship.

The kind of anthropological research initiated in living Hinduism by Milton Singer (under the influence of Robert Redfield) according to me would be very pertinent to resolve this problem of the appropriateness of the terms, "Hindu" or "Brahmanical", in the manner these scholars have formulated the "little culture" and the "big culture" notion or conceptualisation concerning the relationship between the "classical" and the "folk".[33]

**Iconography and Politics of Power**

Champakalakshmi sounded a different note in her book on *Vaisnava Iconography in Tamil Country* (1981),[34] when she defined iconography as the tangible expression of religious symbolism. While she refers to the visual forms of deities yet she sees them as material for the study of religious history. She adds that 'iconography' provides an important tool for the interpretation of the socio-economic changes occurring at the macro and micro levels.

Obviously, Champakalakshmi is not as clear about the relation between Indian art history and iconography, though her book is full of sculptures and monuments. Her book may be taken as an interesting detour in Hindu iconographical studies. Whether this should be its main aim is an important question. It is interesting for it to happen more than sixty four years after Gopinatha Rao's book. Connections between politics and iconographic variations have been proposed, such as the linkage between Viṣṇu and kingship, the deity presiding in the temple is like a king in the palace; the Varāha myth as an allegory for every new conquest made by a king. Pallava Śaivite king identifying himself with Śiva in the Liṅgodbhava myth, or the late Coḷa kings with the Śarabha myth, therefore with icons which represent the domination of Śiva on Viṣṇu, which are material for speculating on the 'royal' intervention on the process of formation of or adopting of a certain relationship amongst the icons of deities.[35] The sectarian rivalries among the Hindu cults as well as between Jainism, Buddhism and the former, over and above the royal intervention, led to the proposition that icon formation is an ongoing and not a fixed process.

Icons, idols, fetishes as social hieroglyphs need to be redefined, so also both religious and social

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meaning of idolatry and iconoclasm. Figures, motifs and symbols which are strictly not religious or mythological, need to be separated and signified, just as it is possible to differentiate the icons of divine goddesses from the semi-divine female figures on the Hindu temple walls, viz., the *devāṅganās*. That takes me back to Purāṇic mythology, the narrative aspect, which has been missed along with the Buddhist narratives, which are quite prolific. (Remember Gopinatha Rao began with Purāṇic mythology in his study of Hindu iconography.) Exploring the theory of pictorial/visual narrative is as much related to Art History for grasping the methodology of contemporary folkloristic and semiotic aspects, which is one of the areas on which the present author has been working.

**The Erotic Motif**

The 'erotic' motif in Indian Art has been a fascinating aspect of its content. While western scholars had been puzzled about it when they first encountered it more than two centuries ago, some even considered it as an immoral aspect of a non-Western, non-Christian, colonised country. In the discovery of Tāntric texts and philosophy of John Woodroffe, who called himself Arthur Avalon (*Principles of Tantras*, 1914), a clue seemed to be found at last. Much of the focus has been on the Khajuraho group of monuments.[36] As the specialist of Temple architecture and symbolism, Stella Kramrisch also took up the matter during the 1940s. The discovery of *Kāmasūtra* text has been significant as a document of Indian culture to reveal the zest for life, which conspicuously should have been expressed through the medium of stone sculpture. It is also interesting that western scholars and publishers used *Kāmasūtra* with matching illustrations of sexual act from Indian art, for profiteering and for overcoming the legal ban on pornography existing in their own countries, proposing the argument that this was the feature of one of the cultures of our world.

During the 1960s and 1970s an atmosphere was generated, almost making erotic subject-matter the main preoccupation of Indian art, with a spate of publications including *Tantra Art* and *Tantra Āsana* by Ajit Mukherjee, coffee table books on *Kāmasūtra*, and also books with profuse illustrations of Khajuraho *mithuna* couples.[37] However, R. Nath's book on Khajuraho[38] and Devangana Desai's book, *Erotic Sculpture of India* (1975)[39] were serious works by Indian scholars to understand the phenomenon in the context of Indian culture, if for instance, they are compared with a paper by Herman Goetz, who gave an analogy of the decadence of medieval Hindu India at the juncture of Islamic invasions with the fall of Roman civilization on the occasion of barbaric invasions from its northern neighbours.[40]

This interest in the erotic subject in Indian sculpture and painting which rose to a feverish pitch was like a climax of love-making followed by sweet exhaustion since then.

Devangana Desai with her specialised knowledge of the erotic subject-matter wished to rearrange our perception of Khajuraho sculptures by concentrating on the religious imagery of Khajuraho (1995)[41] in which she has explored the particular 'cult-based iconographic programme' in some of the major temples. It has been like an exercise in iconology but she refuses to acknowledge it as such.

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Another much discussed iconographic theme since 1950 has been Aditi Uttānapāda (Lajja Gauri) on which a paper had been published by Stella Kramrisch in 1956.[42] Due to its posture and nudity this image type has aroused much interest. Not only have many images become known from the Deccan area but a scholar in regional language (Marathi) R.C. Dhere, in 1978,[43] had been able to bring together much original material. The American scholar, Carol Bolon, made use of all the known sculptures, along with the textual and cultural material, in her book.[44] Since 1950's under Vaiṣṇavism, there have been prolific publications of books especially on the Kṛṣṇa theme in Indian Art.

In some ways these are studies, which do not use "culture" just as a "background" for art objects but rather integrate the society, cult and the sculptural images like the model of Coomaraswamy's work on Yakṣa worship and images.

**Buddhist Iconography**

Correlating textual sources with works of art with a view to decipher the subject-matter and its interpretation was very ably done by the French scholar Alfred Foucher with regard to Buddhist art.[45]

Binoytosh Bhattacharya's work on Buddhist iconography carried out in Baroda (1924-50) is an important landmark not fully recognized. From his *Buddhist Iconography* of 1924 based on *Sādhanamālā* texts (which had been favourably reviewed by Coomaraswamy) through his subsequent works on Vajrayāna texts such as *Sādhanamālā I* (1925) and *Sādhanamālā II* (1938), *Guhyasamāja Tantra* (1931) and *Niṣpannayogāvalī* (1949) published from the Oriental Institute, not only the range of Mahāyāna iconography could be understood, but also the shift to Vajrayāna could be distinguished, which had its own proliferation of image types and hierarchies.[46] This was culminated with the most abstruse subject taken up by him, titled, *An Introduction of Buddhist Esoterism* (1932). Binoytosh Bhattacharya's work has helped in tracing the specific developments in Buddhist sects and art as well as in pin-pointing their metaphysical significances, within the Indian borders.[47] The specific norms of identifications recognized in Buddhist caves at Ellora and the Buddhist images of the post-Gupta from Bihar, Bengal and Orissa have firmly established the foundation of the Vajrayāna Buddhist art in India. (Such as the placement of the seated Dhyānī Buddhas within the *jaṭāmukuṭa* of the *Bodhisattvas*.)

It was only little later that Coomaraswamy wrote his significant paper 'Elements of Buddhist Iconography' (1935), based on a view with which I fully agree, that is, the entente between Buddhism and Hinduism, thus seeing a continuity between a number of aspects of Buddhist iconographic symbols from the Vedic sources.[48] This was an inevitable follow up to buttress the profuse cultural and textual sources with his contention of the Indian origin of Buddha image already propounded in an earlier paper based largely on sculptural images. These papers were well-conceived rejoinders to Foucher's orientalist mis-concept of Buddha image as a cross between Roman philosopher and

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Christian saint.[49] While Stella Kramrisch's masterly paper on the significance of Śiva Mahādeva is quite well known, her earlier paper 'Emblems of the Universal Being' (1935) must be considered as much an epochal contribution to Buddhist iconography in succession to the two above-mentioned papers of Coomaraswamy. Stella Kramrisch concentrated on all the relevant textual sources of the thirty-two-*mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*s which inspired the iconoplasitc images of Buddha during the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods.[50] It was the first in-depth search for cultural sources which served as aesthetic sources for the Indian sculptors to formulate the plastic form of the Buddha image. It is a fitting rebuff to the theory of Greek origin of Buddha image. Binoytosh Bhattacharya paved the way for further research by S.K. Saraswati and his pupils, Pratapaditya Pal and Dipak Bhattacharya. Again, their method was of matching the art image with the texts, but since the concern with images and art objects had been Pratap Pal's focus, his work remains within the bounds of Art History in the context of Vajrayāna Buddhist Art. A concentration on revealing the rich Vajrayāna Buddhist Art and its imageries in the Himālayan countries has thus been an important contribution to Indian art history since the mid-century.

Although space does not permit me to outline the development in the studies in Jain Iconography, in Baroda another scholar Umakant Shah devoted much of his work to this subject[51] though more as a documentater (during 1960s and 1970s). (I feel happy to have had these scholars as my predecessors in Baroda).

**Sivaramamurti**

The basis of Sivaramamurti's variegated scholarship was his immense knowledge of the vast mine of information of Indian art, culture and life contained in Sanskrit sources. This information he tapped extensively and intelligently for the interpretation of Indian art. He looked at the sculptural images through an artist's sensitive eye. Interpreting the meaning of obscure images and symbols and their configurations was his particular forte. He believed that Indian art objects should be looked at from the traditional point of view. That is why he looked for traditional sources of information from the Sanskrit language. Thus, he seems to answer Ananda Coomaraswamy's dictum that traditional arts should be illumined by traditional information.

Since his youthful days he had tapped Kālidāsa's writings thoroughly and so also those of other *kāvya* writers like Harṣa and Bāṇa for information on various aspects of the arts of painting and sculpture. Eventually, he also mastered the hymnal and religious literature together with inscriptional sources so as to support his interpretations and judgements. His particular approach was established in one of his early masterpieces *Sanskrit Literature and Art — Mirrors of Indian Culture* (1954). In the same vein he has produced further works, *Ethical Fragrance in Indian Art and Literature* and *Approach to Nature in Indian Art and Thought*, both published in 1980. But among this class of books the most concentrated is *Citrasūtra of Viṣṇudharmottara* (1979), in which there are comments on various aspects of Indian pictorial and sculptural practices.

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Sivaramamurti had an incredibly perceptive eye and a phenomenal visual memory so much so that scholars of almost the whole world had come to rely on him to identify and authenticate genuine works of art and to expose fakes. He was a stickler for quality and beauty. He would dig up and locate an appropriate verse concerning their beauty or meaning. The essence of his scholarship was in conveying the flavour of an Indian work of art illuminating it as a true *rasika*, an infected aesthete. Though a deeply religious man, he did not over emphasise the role of religion in the shaping of Indian art, nor did he indulge in abstruse philosophising. He was not strictly an aesthetician (i.e., scholar of poetics or *rasa-śāstra*) yet he has served this discipline much more than any Sanskritist rhetorician.

In his magnum opus, *Naṭarāja in Art, Thought and Literature* (1974), he puts in as much as could be done about and concerning Śiva, Pārvatī and Mātṛkās, bringing out the tremendous role that the imagery of dancing Śiva has played in so many facets of Indian culture, ritual, mythology, dance and temple architecture. The image of dancing Śiva had fired the traditional artists, almost to the same extent as had fired Sivaramamurti as a scholar and art lover. His contribution to iconographic studies is immense, particularly with regard to Śiva sculptures. He brought to light *Śatarudrīya* hymns of *Yajurveda* and demonstrated how from them had originated much of Śaiva iconography.

Although, apparently a successor-scholar to Ananda Coomaraswamy, ironically the conclusions that are possible to be drawn from the vast documentation from Sanskrit literature by Sivaramamurti are contrary to the presuppositions of the older scholar. The extensive secular level indulgence in the pictorial arts and the quite obvious 'naturalistic skill' defy Coomaraswamy's constructed notions. The unabashed epicurean delight he felt in presence of the works of art, Sivaramamurti had even culled out descriptions of the sensuality of the youthful male, namely that of young Rāma formulated by Vālmikī, which would have blushed the stern-minded Coomaraswamy. In his iconographical studies, Sivaramamurti initiated the exploration of regional or geographical and chronological differences, though not attempting to explain the reasons for the changes in images from different parts of India. Cumulatively, Sivaramamurti's vast source material has the potential to lead to "iconography", but unfortunately he never attempted to draw conclusions or to theorise. In my view, theorising Sivaramamurti is a desideratum for his umpteen textual references for, "iconology" is a dynamic study of the changes, variations and nuances of the subject-matter, content and context, which had been Sivaramamurti's abiding concern.

**Christian Iconography and Panofsky's Iconology**

When Emile Male began deciphering Christian subject-matter in the thirteenth-century French churches, he laid the foundation of iconography as a branch of the study of subject-matter of religious art, though as a branch of European Art History, yet not as a theologian. He listed the earlier scholars and especially what he called the labours of the archaeologist like Didron whose publication was titled, *Iconographic Chrestienne* (1944). He specified the aim of his own book, *Religious Art in*

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*France: XIII century, A study in Medieval Iconography and its Sources of Inspiration*, to be giving a systematic form to their researchers and wherever possible to complete them.[52] He hoped

> that it may prove of service to historians of art, for to study medieval art . . . without reference to subject-matter and with attention wholly given to progress in technique, leads to misunderstanding and confusion of the aims of successive periods.

We should not be surprised to note (as has been candidly confessed by Emile Male) that even western people had forgotten that whatever had been depicted in the medieval churches was based on Biblical texts. That is why, subsequently, the overtly visible images on the church facades and portals, on the pillar capital inside, on the stain glass window as well as the mosaics and frescoes on the walls, came to be recognized as a Bible for the illiterate.

Emile Male's were among the first elaborate, systematic and more accurate studies in which medieval Christian theological texts were sifted and relevant portions selected and compared with actual images, reliefs, mosaics, murals and stained glass windows and finally the illustrated manuscripts, which were tucked away in storages.

Subsequently, there have been other western art historians who further developed this aspect. One important example is that of Aby Warburg, who had linked the interest in subject-matter with the patron and the historical times. We need to define this in the context of the study of Indian art history, an idea of which can be had from the discussion which follows.

Iconography has quite rightly been now recognized in western Art History as exploration and interpretation of the subject-matter in a work of art and therefore the alternative term "Iconology", was coined and defined by Erwin Panofsky. He began writing in the 1920s and the 1960s accumulated a huge body of writing by him. Many art historians think that his single-most contribution of art is his new perception of the "content of art". Panofsky's attitude to content studies is part of his broader attitude to art historical discipline, which he sees as belonging to the "Humanities". His was not an advocacy of the so-called multi-disciplinary approach but another way of locating what is intrinsic to a work of art which is larger than the style analysis as demonstrated by Heinrich Wolfflin. One of his consistent explorations has been to show how have the classical Greco-Roman aspects retained and mingled with Christian art through the medieval and Renaissance periods, apart from the two obvious aspects of figure type and norms of beauty.

He demonstrated how often, behind the "illustration" of a Christian text, there was a hidden classical (or Roman) source, which had been allegorised for Christian purpose. Thus, the content could not be properly illumined if one did not uncover the source and the allegorising purpose. This could be the artist's own invention or patron's intention or reflection of the milieu. Through a number of studies of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century art in Italy, he demonstrated the influence of Neo-Platonism on artists like Botticelli and Michelangelo.[53] Similarly, in his magnum

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opus, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1966) he went beyond the exercise of earlier scholars like Friedlander, who had done the complicated task of "catalogue raisonne" or sorting out the artist's work and bringing out the clear-cut stylistic features of individual artists like Jan Van Eyck, Rogier Van der Weyden, etc. But Panofsky's painstaking study of texts and of various objects and narratives in each and every painting showed how the task of an Art Historian was not exhausted by only "identification", "authentification" or even by "stylistic analysis".[54] The hunting around for sources of content brought out the relevance of "culture" in a much more pointed way within the requirements of art historical purpose and not in the earlier sense of just the "cultural background". His studies have revealed more about the nature and impact of patronage than those by any cultural historian. By expanding the scope of "iconography", initially taken as religious content, Panofsky introduced the term "iconology" not only as a step beyond 'iconography' but to include all aspects that would illuminate the content of a work of art. Often the subject-matter in a painting was not "straight" illustration, but a process of allegorisation had taken place, which has to be unlocked. In some extraordinary works the signification of the disguised symbolism remained hidden with specific object or paraphernalia. He also showed the difference between "symbolism" and "allegory" in visual arts, demonstrating how "content study" is to go beyond "description" and how it enriches the study of Art History bringing it close to the "Humanities".

Panofsky neither spoke against the style analysis nor the cultural historian's approach to Art History. He also did not make any direct reference to Freudian and Jungian schools of psychology, which were simultaneously changing and enriching the study of content in literature. By voluminous studies of actual unearthing of relevant material, that is not as a theorist but by accumulating hitherto untapped material and available appropriate sources, he has shown how he was almost ahead of literary critics in their similar content studies, such as Structuralism, Semiotics and Psychoanalysis. Note the manner Panofsky had analyzed the significance of "melancholia" in the life and work of Albrecht Durer.

I consider Panofsky's "iconological" approach "Post-formalist" study of "content", about which hardly any Indian scholar is aware of in the field of Art History. No Indian scholar has even used the term "iconology" in any of his/her writings, although we have a rich source of religious and textual origin of much works of Indian art objects and we could go beyond the mere physical description or description of subject-matter to the analytical approach of the content and all those aspects which take us to the subtleties of content. Actually Panofsky in his investigations demonstrates the stage of "synthesis" to follow the "analysis". Between the approaches extensively demonstrated by Wolfflin and Panofsky, the whole gamut of aspects is extensively covered in the study of art objects in the context of individual's creativity as well as the larger cultural context.

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**Iconology and the Relevance of Linguistics for Indian Art History**

The reference to Panofsky has been made to argue that "iconographic studies" should lead to "iconology proper", that is, meaning and interpretation and not merely subject (or subject-matter, content) though even subject-matter implies how the theme has been depicted, but to note also change and variations and their causes.

In the manner J.N. Banarjea outlined his iconographical programme he was almost laying the foundation of iconological studies. But unfortunately he did not realise the implication of his own enterprise.

It is in this direction I made certain efforts when I organized the seminar on *Vaiṣṇavism and Indian Art* (1883).[55] *Śeṣaśāyī Sculptures of Viṣṇu* (1983) had been visualized as a pilot study in iconology.[56] *Jātaka* stories in Buddhist art has been a project encompassing the problem of narrative structure and Buddhist hermeneutics, which is a sequel to my *Life of Buddha in Indian Sculpture*.[57]

Mention should be made of the interesting debate between Susan Huntington and Vidya Dehejia which is a contribution to iconology proper. This conceptual discussion on symbols dealt with how symbols acquire the meaning and how the meaning could be multivalent. Refer to Susan Huntington's paper *Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism*,[58] and Vidya Dehejia's paper *Aniconism and the Multivalence of Elements* (1991) and her long rejoinder by Susan Huntington in 1992.[59] They especially took up the wide range of aniconic symbols and how a particular ensemble could represent an episode in Buddha's life. Therefore also Buddha, and the spot or place of incident like, Bodh-Gayā for Enlightenment and hence also pilgrimage place could be read into it. My above-mentioned book on *Life of Buddha in Indian Sculpture* and the ongoing work on the *Jātaka*s also have much relevance to the debate between Huntington and Dehejia.

When my young colleague at Baroda, Shivaji Panikkar, wrote his doctoral thesis under my guidance, and now published as, *Saptamātṛkā Worship and Sculptures*, 1996, it had been visualised as an 'iconological' study, as it dealt with widening and concretising the iconographies while the Mātṛkā cult grew within the society, not needed in western India and elsewhere. Panikkar has expanded the discussion from the Marxist point of view as well as within the hierarchy of Brahmanical pantheon. Gauri Parimoo's doctoral study carried out in Baroda dealing with *devāṅganā* sculptures in *nāgara* temples was also 'iconological' in its scope, exploring the place of the non-deified woman in the architectural design and symbolism. In the context of Devāṅganā imagery, Gauri has drawn attention to the significance of feminine symbolism as it emerged through the universal human development along with the possibilities of distinguishing between religious and socio-cultural spheres as defined by C.J. Jung and Ernst Cassirer.

The above-mentioned iconological studies were taken up as a sequel to an earlier doctoral research carried out under my guidance by Deepak Kannal on the stylistic layers observable in the Hindu cave sculptures at Ellora in terms of Heinrich Wolfflin's and Stella Kramrisch's notions of sculptural

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form. This was a result of directly perusing the art historical writing of those who defined the notion of "form" in art as well as the Vienna School of Art History.[60]

To the extent that the pursuit of "iconology" deals with meaning and interpretation of a work of art, Indian art historians who adopted the European term "iconography" never came to the point when the relationship between Indian linguistics and iconology (and the material from it) as an extension of Art Historical method evolved by European scholars, could have been perceived, since the Indian Sanskrit scholarship is very rich in linguistics, having a good focus on the problems of word-meaning and sentence-meaning (*anvitābhidhānavāda*).

The older generation of Indian art historians never discovered this relationship. Most unfortunately it even escaped Coomaraswamy, who was a scholar with great depth. It alluded the next generation scholar C. Sivaramamurti, whose familiarity with Sanskrit literature was so phenomenal, yet he went round and round in his selection of relevant Sanskrit passages of interpretative nature, which he termed as "flavour".[61] If linguistics is a tool for interpreting medium of language and literature, its utilisation for interpreting iconoplastic arts should also be the next step.

So far in my own art-historical work, I have happily stumbled on several interesting concepts from Sanskrit poetics relevant for Indian art history of visual arts, that is an ongoing discussion on *aprastut-praśaṁsā* (equivalent to "allegory") and *kavi-pratibhā* (equivalent to individual artist's genius), along with its corollary, *kavi-vyāpāra* (the handling of his material), i.e., "language", by the poet/artist. Equally enlightening is the debate on *svabhāvokti* and *citramīmāṁsā* as the literary critic's deliberations on when the poet depicts a thing or experience and which paradigm constitutes the dividing line between mere depiction and *kavi vyāpāra*.[62]

**A Note on Anvitābhidhāna Theory and Meaning in Indian Art**

The very hoary tradition of Indian linguistic studies has also had its preoccupation with the theories of "meaning" which have much relevance both to semiology (which I equate with iconology) as well as the Indian pictorial and iconoplastic arts. Indian pictorial arts have never been discussed in terms of how the conglomerations of images lead to particular meanings even though at times they are transparently obvious.

In the pictorial or sculptural image conglomerations and the relevance of their interrelations, there is a parallel in Indian linguistic theories, namely the meaning of a "word" as it can connote by itself and the meaning of a "word" when it is part of a "sentence". Rather we are concerned with the theories, which refer to the meaning of 'words' as they occur in a 'sentence', when eventually the meaning of the "total sentence" is, what is of significance. This discussion from Indian linguistics needs to be brought in as a possible contribution to the theory of interpretation of pictorial arts from the Indian Sanskrit critical tradition in order to enrich the thinking concerning the former. The over-

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quoted *rasasūtra*, the customary references to *Śilpa* texts, together with the mere descriptive instances pertaining to the uses and involvement with pictorial arts in ancient times, do not constitute a critical theory of the pictorial arts.[63]

In the discussion of the visual arts we have been limiting ourselves to the analogy of *śabda* and *artha* as equivalents for "form" and "content", without realising the phenomenon of the import of group of *śabda*s and then how the *artha* emerges due to their relationship or associations.

The eminent scholar Kunjunni Raja in his *Indian Theories of Meaning* has given a parallel with the semiological phenomenon of the "signifier" and the "signified" as defined by De Saussure with the implications, that the Indian concept of *śabda* and *artha* have to be understood in these terms.[64] Yet, the wide-ranging application of many of the other germinal notions have not been indicated. I will endeavour to take up some of these notions in this section of the paper.

Firstly, from the point of view of pictorial and sculptural arts it is significant to note that the language theorists have employed the term *vikalpa*, which is not the external object to which a word, *śabda* is referring to, but rather its mental construct comprehended by the listener, which is also a mental image which is almost the pictorial (or visual) image received in the onlooker's mind.

The other relevant notion is the "words" had been classified in terms of *yaugika*, *rūḍha*, *yogārūḍha*, etc., as early as Yāska as revealed in his interpretation of Vedic words. Here too the "word" could be substituted by "visual image" and the classification we obtain is the *yaugika* etymological meaning, which could perhaps be the primary or naturalistic reading. *Rūḍha* would, stand for conventional visual image, that is, by popular usage a certain meaning gets attached to it. In the third case, *yogārūḍha*, which refers to compound words and therefore is equivalent to a group of visual images clustered together, would receive meaning from etymological or naturalistic references and also conventional or usage references. The meaning by usage has been upheld by Patañjali and also *mīmāṁsaka*s. This notion of "multiple meanings" of the "word" has implication on pictorial symbols as well as the iconography of Indian deities.

Now, the most interesting theory is the controversy between the relative importance of 'word' and "sentence", which amongst others was started and elaborated by Bhartṛhari. *A propos* the visual arts, we are not directly concerned with the *sphoṭa* theory, according to which a sentence is to be considered a "single undivided utterance" and its meaning as "an instantaneous flash of insight" (*pratibhā*).[65] Perhaps the group of visual images cannot reveal the vital meaning so instantaneously. But inasmuch as a "linguistic sentence" is concerned, if we understand by it a total painting or a sculptural ensemble comprising a cluster of images and *āyudha*s in a certain grouping and hierarchy, then the 'word' versus "sentence" issue raised in Sanskrit linguistics would be very relevant from the pictorial point of view. Here we leave out the defense for the individual 'word' and its independent significance as propounded by the many Sanskrit rhetoricians. But rather we would prefer the notions giving priority to the "sentence" in terms of implied meaning. Surprisingly, I find that the

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modern Indian scholars hardly use the term "syntagm" as employed by Roland Barthes (vide modern European linguistics and literary criticism) because 'syntactical' would restrict to grammatical aspect and correctness while at best to the literal meaning. I am therefore drawing attention to those terms which have relational bearing among the words and are therefore applicable to relational aspects when pictorial sculptural images are juxtaposed.

The *anvitābhidhāna* theory associated with *mīmāṁsaka*s, Prabhākara and others, is also very relevant to the pictorial arts; both in the definition of iconography (sculptural images) as well as where allegorical implications (such as in paintings or *Jātaka* reliefs) are involved. According to this theory, the meaning of a sentence is made up of the individual word meaning and their mutual relation. The *mīmāṁsaka*s have emphasised that word by itself, never expresses any meaning; it is only the sentence that does it. Every single word is understood in so far as it is related to the other words in the sentence. This phenomenon would be very true for the interpretation of a painting when it is substituted for the sentence, while the word is substituted by the individual visual image. The single image would get a meaning only in relation to other images present in the complete painting (sentence) and eventually then the entire painting would unfold the meaning held within it, to be known as "sentence" meaning. Even Abhinavagupta held the view that the "sentence" has a unitary meaning of its own arguing that the constituent "words" possess meaning only as they are related to this unitary sentence meaning. (As I support the *anitābhidhānavāda*, I am leaving out the arguments in favour of the *abhihitānvayavāda*.)

The view is also significantly held by Bhartṛhari and some of his predecessors that a "sentence" is really found in the minds of the speaker and the listener. In terms of pictorial arts it would imply that the cluster and its meaning is in the mind of the artist and likewise in the mind of the on-looker as he gradually begins to comprehend it.

The three factors of *akāṅkṣā*, *yogyatā* and *sannidhi* (proximity) propounded for the words, would also apply to the visual images. *Ākaṅkṣā* is the factor by which words are related to each other and receive additional signification leading to *vākyārtha* (sentence meaning). *Saṁsarga* refers to association of word meanings and *tātparya* for purport or the above theory, that the *ākaṅkṣā* of visual images results in additional signification to each other in order to subsequently arrive at *tātparya*.

The term *tātparya* is again very relevant for the transition from iconography to iconology, Abhinava-gupta characterised as an *alaṅkārika*, has spoken about four distinct functions of 'words'. At the outset we substitute these by visual images. Thus visual images have the function of *abhidhā*, *tātparya*, *lakṣaṇa* and *vyañjana*. *Abhidhā* is the power of words (here visual image) to refer to the primary meaning only in universal terms and in isolation. The meaning relation among the words is conveyed by *tātparya śakti* which is being variously interpreted. *Tātparya* would also stand for "meaning" of visual images. Ānandavardhana did mention the importance of the speaker's intention in conveying the meaning of a passage but did not recognize *tātparya* as a separate *śakti* of words,

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instead emphasised on *lakṣaṇa* and *dhvani*. Nevertheless, Bhoja had elaborated on *tātparya* as equivalent to intended meaning. He also accepted the Naiyāyika (Jayanta's) position of the sentence meaning resulting out of cumulative effect of *saṁhatyakārita*, that is the *tātparya śakti* of words is significant that Dhanika, the commentator on Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, advocates in his theory that *dhvani* is included in *tātparya*. He argues that the expressed meaning and the suggested meaning are not entirely different from one another. I strongly believe with Dhanika and other *alaṅkārika*s that *tātparya* can cover the whole range of speaker's (herewith painter's or sculptor's) intention and encompass all implications emerging in the wake of the expressed sense.

We can work out a very interesting example of ensemble of human figures and other attributes, namely the male and female pair hovering in the sky, know as *gandharva* couple, which is their conventional meaning and without any other connotation. (However, when the hovering male figure holds a garland, he will be identified as *mālādhara*.) But when the couple is seated together with a *nāga* hood forming a canopy over the male figure, it is read as a *nāgarāja* couple. The *gandharva* couple does not apparently have any erotic relation with each other, because the sculptor concentrated on obtaining a convincing effect of flying movement. But the *nāga* couple can appear as a happy *dampati* exuding certain amount of sensuality. The male figure can be given attributes like *jaṭā* as headgear, snake and *triśūla* in hands, to be read as Śiva and therefore the female partner as his consort, Pārvatī. Some sculptors permeate the pair with intense sensuality almost answering Kālidāsa's evocation of the honeymooning couple, known as *āliṅgana mūrti*. Variations will suggest both of them playing *caupāṭ*, or alternatively Rāvaṇa Shaking Kailāsa. Again, different attributes would turn the same couple into Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī.

Significantly, M.J.T. Mitchell had quite rightly extended the scope of the term "iconology" beyond the interpretation of pictorial or visual images,[66] but also had extended it to word-images and any media which lead to conjuring up an image in the mind, which is received with a signification. Accordingly, iconology involves the phenomena, theory and systems of such signification. Mitchell had even coined the term "literal iconology" which can be compared with what the Sanskritists call *citramīmāṁsā*.[67]

I had realised the signification of certain notions from Sanskrit linguistics and poetics when I took up the interpretation of a set of Mewar school paintings based on the *Satsai* verses of the Braja Bhāṣā poet Bihārī. The Rajasthani painter had followed the import of the poet's intentions so closely that uncovering what I called the picture puzzles was possible only with comprehension of especially the usage in the verbal text.[68]

The opportunity to undertake an elaborate study of this kind was offered by a set of Mewārī paintings based on Sūrdās's interpretation of *Kṛṣṇa-Līlā* in his *Sūrsāgar* composed in Braja Bhāṣā. This is carried out in a comprehensive doctoral research by Rita Sodha, conceptualising the influence of Vallabhācārya's philosophy of Vaiṣṇavism, among other aspects. The paintings are very much like

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'word conglomerations' but neither as grammatically structured sentences nor narrative situations of episodes, rather they constituted 'image — juxtapositions and sequences' requiring analysis and synthesis, in terms of *anvitābhidhānavāda* or theory.[69]

**New Art History**

This brings me ultimately to the emergence of the New Art History, which is part of the ongoing process of the growth of Art History. It may also be termed as the "Critical Art History" originally coined by Lionello Venturi,[70] as the goal of Art History but used as a distinctive term to distinguish certain specific western art historians by Michael Podro.[71] New Art History is also the first and frank questions by art historians to consider and deliberate on what art historians have been doing over the various generations. If a person is a product of his time, this also applies to scholars of "Human Sciences" including the art historians. To provide an insight into the methodologies, arguments, judgements, preferences and prejudices of a scholar in a given time, is as much a part of the concern of New Art History. This is yet another reason why earlier views may be questioned, which may not be acceptable today and may require to be replaced. Otherwise, so far, the changes in the views held or evolved by earlier scholars, were necessitated due to new or fresh information becoming available subsequently, which would also lead to the correction of wrong information perpetuated earlier. This has been the method of the prevailing Art History.

While I perceive New Art History as a development inherent within the discipline as it has been shaping, very much like the intellectual relationship between the concepts of Post-Modernism and Modernism, Norman Bryson finds it necessary to polarise it with what he terms as prevailing academic Art History. He characterises it with the epithet of "conservative" and sometimes "official", because it is practised through institutional patronage like the museum curators, the university academia, and the crucial relevance such work has for art dealers. The respectability given to the exhibition catalogue produced by the museum curator, often for officially sponsored prestigious exhibitions, is a stock example.

The conservativeness of the prevailing Art History, Bryson observes, is due to limiting itself to "what was possible in the period" attitude.[72] He further remonstrates, that Historicism demands a purity or puritanism of perspective in which "linkage from the present into the past is viewed with suspicion and alarm." (Interestingly this accusation also applies to Ananda Coomaraswamy.)

Bryson has made yet another point concerning the academic Art History, especially as practised in the English-speaking countries, that there is a significant disassociation between "Art History" and "writing on contemporary art", each of which operates at the level of two different worlds.[73] However, he observed that in France such a disassociation was less pronounced because of intellectual movements since 1945, Existentialism and Phenomenology, but particularly Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Art History in France has been aware of the current debates among them, refering to art object as an image and considering it as a sign to be interpreted, hence it is naturally hermeneutic

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(I like to mention that in my own approach I have endeavoured to "marry" Art History with Art Criticism. The objective of conducting two parallel Master's degree courses with distinctive character of Art History and Art Criticism for nearly twenty five years at Baroda University, has been an opportunity for stimulating academic exercise of this kind.)

Bryson then proceeds to trace the American developments in New Art History, through the legacy of the writings of Meyer Schapiro and the next generation of Art Historians and critics such as Baxandal, Michael Fried, John Barrell, Svatlana Alpers and others. In England especially he lists up such journals which carried the work of those which lead to New Art History, including *Block, Art History, Word and Image*, beside the courses given by T.J. Clark in 1975 at Leeds University, and his own two books on mid-nineteenth-century French Art.[74]

For another ideologue of Art History, Donald Preziosi, "there is a crisis in Art Historical discipline" and this realisation under lines New Art History.[75] The crisis is precipitated partly due to how to respond to the developments in human sciences at large and specifically in Cultural History, Sociology, Philosophy, Linguistics, Literary Criticism and Film Studies and the tensions, resistances and oscillations generated by this confrontation.

One instance of re-assessing scholars of earlier generation is how the Americans are discovering a new relevance of Meyer Schapiro. While his interests spread through European Medieval art to Renaissance and the twentieth century, which in itself is remarkable; that is if one could do an intense study of Moissac sculptures (French twelfth century), one could also go into hidden symbolism of the Merode Altar piece (Flemish fifteenth century) and reach up to discovering new meaning in Cézanne's "still life" painting with apples (late nineteenth century). The same apples the rendering of which had been contrasted with "transitoriness of Impressionism" to stand for what is "permanent" or their "thingness" for all time, and thereby exemplify what should be the artistic emotion, as distinct from human emotion almost to be equated with being "impersonal", are now perceived psycho-analytically to reflect Cézanne's hidden sexuality which had been overt in his teenage letters and early paintings of nudes. The apples unconsciously represent the ripe female breasts and sensuous body curvatures. Schapiro was also the first art historian to write on visual image as sign, the meaning of which can be altered with slight variation according to the "character" it is going to represent in the story.[76]

In England those who are interested in New Art History are pointing out to the place of Adrian Stokes who worked in isolation but not in the centre unlike someone as Kenneth Clark.[77] Through his footnotes one would gather how he appreciated the work of Panofsky (the German) and Meyer Schapiro (the American) besides Gombrich's early writings (recent German migrant to England at that time). His specific reference to the theories of Joseph Strzygowski (Vienna school) and Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* shows his affiliation with German Art History. This is exemplified in his book *The Quattro Cento*, analysing the fifteenth-century Italian sculpture and architecture, the prose of

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which is written with a view to bringing out the ambience as experienced by the eye, which makes him the lone English-speaking Art Historian of the kind during 1930s. This book must have also influenced Stella Kramrisch's *Hindu Temple* of 1946. His interests spilled into art of the modern times deepening his understanding of psychoanalysis and art expression (Melani Kleing), schezophrenia and visionary experience (Aldous Huxley).[78]

Here are some instances of the ongoining reinterpretations, one of which has been called the "Shoe Debate", which is essentially a debate initiated by Martin Heideggar (1935) on a painting of Vincent Van Gogh in which several art historians had joined such as Meyer Schapiro (1968) and Jacques Derrida (1977) followed by Marxist art historian John Walker (1980), Marxist critic John Berger (1983), and Marxist literary theorist Frederic Jameson.[79] The shoes painted by Magritte (1936) and Andy Warhol (1970s) were also considered by them in terms of reinterpretation. Van Gogh's shoes were of peasants and also perhaps his own, where as Warhol's "diamond dust" shoes were seen as the former's capitalist destruction. For Heidegger they belonged to the peasant women (therefore to the mother earth), Derrida gave Freudian slant and Margritte combined the shoe and the wearer relationship.

Similarly the Dutch still life paintings, seen for the first time as objects connected with the prosperous life of the *nouveau-riche* middle-class of the seventeenth century (first time observed by the nineteenth-century philosopher Hegel), now for the French structuralist critic, Roland Barthes, represents, "consumerism" and "gluttonary"; may be that is the reason why the French call this genre of painting 'nature morte' of objects, that is "dead game".[80]

Bryson's own position is worked out in relation to Ernest Gombrich's involvement with problems of pictorial representation as determined by perception of the eye, which Bryson terms as "perceptualism". Although Gombrich wrote a specialised monograph on this problem (*Art and Illusion*) breaking it up in terms of schema, observation to enfolding of developments in European Art, even connecting it with art of the twentieth century. Gombrich has been seen as a part of the chain of writings on the problem of pictorial-representation in the visual arts as ushered in by Leon Battista Alberti at the onset of the Renaissance developments towards naturalism in Italy.

Bryson would not agree that perceptualism could function as an autonomous phenomenon, as exclusive pre-occupation of the painter without the intervention of social and cultural recognition, and thus expands his own Marxist or modified Marxist position still retaining the term perceptualism, bringing in concepts of image, power and social formation, that is the role of patron, church, ideology and so forth, besides the "reading" made by the onlooker. Thus, the representational configuration is to be seen as "sign" determined by the social setting and also as "read" by the onlooker.[81] One determines how it has evolved, and the other in the various ways it can be "read". The latter point is very important for art-historical research and writing which he calls "hermeneutic". But Gombrich's focus on problems of representation during the 1960s, which was otherwise one of the pre-occupations

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of Gestalt Psychology, was itself an epochal moment and he was the first art historian to bring this within the concern of art historical writing. Gombrich as successor of the Vienna school and German art history has also been concerned with patron, subject-matter and meaning relationship as in his book *Symbolic Images*, a methodology initiated by Aby Warburg.[82]

I would consider Michel Foucault's analysis as very significant in demonstrating how the artist manipulates spatial devices in such a way to direct the onlooker to see the pictorial space in a specific attitude, like he did for Velazquez's painting *La Meninas*.[83] In a way this is a continuation of Alois Reigl's first observations of the use of gaze of the characters within the painting by the artist while at the same time how the onlooker's gaze is involved with the painting.[84]

This brings me to offer some comments on sociology and pictorial arts relationship and now in the context of New Art History.

Much has been said concerning sociology and the art practice and the contextual place of the art object, beginning from Hippolyte Taine and Hegel since the first half of the nineteenth century. It was persistently purposed in his monumental studies during the mid-twentieth century by the Marxist sociological art historian, Arnold Hauser.[85]

But I think that we cannot forget the contribution of Aby Warburg because in his study of the role of the patron he drew attention to the subject-matter or context of the programmatic works of art, even that of the popular level and that all subject-matter need not be considered either highbrow or that of interest only of aristocracy and middle-class. He was the first to explore the role of an intellectual circle with whom an artist had a rapport. For the milieu of the period he used the term "cultural psychology", instead of "a nebulous Hegelian spirit of the age". Thus, Warburg worked on real human beings and collected all such sources which can contribute to the reconstruction and the exploration of the milieu.

Social History of Art has been a preoccupation considered outside the main concern of prevailing Art History about half a century ago, in spite of the work of the earlier mentioned Hauser, Frederick Antal and Francis Klingender, who prepared monumental studies on Mannerism, on Florentine Painting and on Art and Industrial Revolution respectively.[86] It has been observed that John Berger in his chosen journalistic medium kept alive such work. But Berger was rather extending the analysis made by Walter Benjamin (who was writing in German during the Nazi years of 1940s) for the English-speaking world through the mother of all mass media today, that is the T.V. image in the age of mechanical reproduction.[87]

During 1970s the art historian T.J. Clark began studies of French art of the mid-nineteenth century, which are much more integrated within the cultural and political matrix. Clark did not agree with approaching Art History in terms of separate methodologies but stood for an agenda for the integration, focusing around social structure and conditions. This is the connotation of what Bryson argues about pictorial or visual sign to be considered as a social sign and therefore to locate

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its meaning in the social context. Of course it was possible because of well-documented artist's lives, works that were known and collected in art galleries, contemporary official and newspaper records of social conditions, political tensions and struggles, the economic dominations and controls and so forth. With T.J. Clark's studies it is claimed that new art history had ushered in the British art historical scene.[88]

It must be noted that the sociological theorising which may be based on twentieth-century literature, mainly novels, George Lukacs writing in Russian and dealing with novels in Russian, French and German; and Raymond Williams handling British and American novels in the English language, and how they reflect the "human condition", could not be made as criteria for the visual-plastic arts, because the level of intensity with which each of these media, the literary and the pictorial, interact with the day-to-day socio-political situation of lives of individuals, families and societies will markedly differ.[89] A universal sociological theory of art is a near impossibility. According to the theory of Deconstruction it would be a mistake for a humanities discipline to be so hegemonistic to indulge in formulating "grand theories" yet again.

Moreover, if Marxist slant can be crucial or not is also a question, though Marxist sociologist would like everyone to see this enterprise as the most natural thing to do, but not so much as a personal choice on the part of the scholar. Some scholars may not wish to take the Marxist slant even though accepting the sociological context as inevitable.

The transaction between artist's production of a work of art and its onlookers is a very limited one. The work of art lying in an art gallery seen by thousands does not necessarily mean transaction. It may also lie in a church or have a particular placement in relation to its architecture, as can also be the case with a Hindu temple, or housing in a private collection or tucked away in a bundle of manuscripts. Factories mass-producing objects available in markets and consumed by thousands of users to responses to social matters, icons, political leaders, folk heroes, popular figures like film actors, pop singers, perhaps pulp fiction writers, and now some of the popular T.V. serials, as well as those actors who play certain characters who have clicked; this is certainly a different kind of transaction. The comparisons are not so easy and theorisation based on such comparisons may sound rightly plausible, but would apply more in terms of case-by-case study. A painting like Manet's *Olympia* used for this kind of sociological discussion and analyzes is not the "rule" but perhaps more of an exception.[90]

However, it will be a very tall order for the study of pictorial arts of those cultures and periods (like India) where more and more art objects are becoming known but social conditions have either not been documented or where documents are scanty, with the fear that the conclusions arrived at would be irrelevant and far-fetched. A whole range of sociological information have to be documented which is not the primary role of the art historian, something that the *Annals* in France have carried out in the field of History.[91] Although they also lay emphasis on the socio-political and economic

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aspects, besides geographical and ecological factors of a culture, I like to underline the micro-details of the *Annals* archival collection and how to make use of the vast array of archival sources. Indian art historians need to build a vast array of pictorial archive and learn the use and implication of this wealth of source.

When I refer to sociological information in the Indian context I mean the relevant information from all periods of Indian art history and not only pertaining to the last two centuries. Sociology is one way to break the disassociation of "Art History" and "Art Criticism", between the studies in art of the past and art of the present.

Just like I see Marxist as a highly ideologically determined aspect of sociological approach, I would like to formulate Feminist art history also as an offshoot of sociological approach to art history. Here again sociology of women *per se* and feminism in art cannot be equated. Thus women as pictorial artists and their expressions as a specific section of new art history too require to be demarcated. Otherwise we have to concede that the feminist sociologist is very ripe to become the feminist art historian, though I have no objection to it.

At times New Art History appears as an attitude which does not accept demarcation for Art History, at least that is the impression one gets by reading the discourses brought up in some new titles like *The New Art History*, edited by A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello, and *Rethinking Art History* by Donald Preziosi. However, I like to argue in support of the view that it is the demarcation which gives contour to Art Historical discipline.

I would still think in, as much the visual sign should be taken primarily a social sign, it must be considered so only when such a relevance is possible, but perhaps to consider visual sign as linguistic sign has many more possibilities. Several linguistic concepts or phenomena could then seem to have a scope for interpretative analyzes as far as the visual sign is considered. Arguments of this kind have been put forward by Donald Preziosi, who was a pupil of Meyer Schapiro.

In my view New Art History has to be considered more as a method of 'practice', rather than essentially "theory" or a "theoretical standpoint". That is why the actual analyzes and interpretation of specific art object (works of art) is what would matter. In that way the perpetual question for Art History still remains; what do you write about works of art, which will constitute Art History (and not Social History, Psychoanalyzes, Linguistics, *per se*). Therefore a "frame" if not "framework" for Art Historical writing cannot be altogether given up. I am therefore interested in how Meyer Schapiro analyzes Cézanne's still-life with apples or Julia Kristeva's psychoanalyzes of Giovanni Bellni's 'Madonna and Child' paintings, Jean Boudrillard's analyzes of such paintings which are classed under the 'trompel'oeuil'. The latter two represent the French contribution of New Art History, with studies by Roland Barthes, Foucault, Louis Marin and Hurbert Damisch.[92]

Interest in psychoanalyzes and art in my view may be enumerated as yet another feature of the New Art History (that by Art Historians and not just as extension or branch of Psychoanalytical

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Studies). Of course, it was initiated by Sigmund Freud himself with his detailed analysis of Leonardo's life with his works. Subsequently, contributions have been made through Panofsky's exposition of melancholia in the life and works of Durer,[93] Meyer Schapiro's work on Cézanne, the writing of Adrian Stokes dealing with Greek civilization and modern artists, and Gombrich's explorations in psychoanalysis. To these should be added the full-fledged psychoanalytical studies on Michelangelo by R.S. Liebert, certain writings by Julia Kristeva, and on Surrealist painters like Magritte by M. Wolfenstein.[94] This approach too has broken down the barrier between Art History and Art Criticism.

It does not require much thinking to observe that prevailing Indian Art History has been conservative, and during the last decade and half among other have also resulted in the many official and conventional kind of catalogues for the Festival of India Art Exhibitions held in several western countries. Actual Indian art historical studies are in a kind of "time-wrap", in the sense that even within the norms of prevailing Art History, these have not fully matured during the last half a century. Not only is the archaeological report approach dominating but also iconographic description is almost like an elementary description of themes and subjects. The consequences of the close-minded attitude of presuming to be "constructing the past as past" have led us in India into the most glaring situation, viz., the disjointedness between writing of art history of the past as well as the writing of art criticism of the art at present. There are exceptions in this situation such as the teaching of Art History at Baroda and a handful of art historical and critical writers. Art historical writing in India has to carry out the miracle of aqueezing in simultaneously all the available methodologies and bridge the gap with New Art History.

In order to conclude, my view is that Iconology with its doors always open to all possible sources of meaning (texts, society, artist's genius) inherently leads to New Art History which is a point of convergence of the developments in literary criticism, film analysis, the parallism of absorption of sociological and its special Marxist form, psychoanalytical studies, both in human groups and individuals, and uncovering it by the reader through art objects; thus casting a wider net for content sources. Hence, the added relevance of material from Indian Sanskrit linguistics of the last two thousand years. The multi-layered meaning, ambiguities in the meaning, metaphor and iconology, codes of visual culture, can be seen in new light and become yet again tools to add to content analysis.

I find a surprising support to my contention for the remedies required to be implemented in Indian art historical studies in the following quotation of W.J.T. Mitchell, which also vindicates my view of linking relevant aspects of Sanskrit literary criticism to the interpretative aspect of Indian Art History:

> To the extent that "iconology" has its roots in Art History rather than in Literary Criticism, and in a highly literary form of Art History that insists on seeing images in relation to philosophical, historical and literary texts, it would seem almost superfluous

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to have to make a case for an interest in language and literature in the study of visual arts.[95]

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# Introduction

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# Towards New Art History

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*Parul Dave Mukherji*
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This book has grown out of what was originally envisaged as a staff-student seminar at the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, Baroda. It acquired larger dimensions partly through the interest and participation of scholars and critics outside the Department but also through the range and scope of the papers presented. The Seminar, structured by issues that have profoundly engaged students and staff of the Department over the past decade and more, was organized in February 2002 around the theme 'New Art History and Indian Art.' It was conceived in order to extend passionate classroom discussions that primarily centered around the relevance and value of "traditional" art historical methodologies today. The crux of the debate lay in the clash of an Art History predominantly concerned with an art-object oriented approach entailing issues of authorship, connoisseurship, attribution and chronology with a framework oriented approach which shifted attention to the political, social, economic structures that under-gird the production of art. In part, these debates have grown out of an increasing discomfort with the disciplinary framework of an Art History that could scarcely explain the field of the visual in our time. For many students, the impetus for, indeed, urgency of accounting for the visuality of contemporary India was not matched by the explanatory capacity of canonical theories of Indian art that circulated in the institutional space of Art History. The inadequacy of these theories showed up most vividly in the face of new objects in the arena of the visual. Papers and presentations at Departmental seminars challenged the boundaries and assumptions of traditional Art History; a seminar presentation on *Amar Citra Kathā*[1] by Sharada Natarajan which challenged most of the conventional assumptions about "high" art in 1992 marks one such moment. Moreover, the range of topics that were available to students for their M.A. dissertations for over a decade clearly marked a growing dissatisfaction with the boundaries of conventional Art History. Breaking outside the ambit of high art, the focus of study extended from popular, mass-produced art to film posters, MTV imagery to digital art. This did not imply that traditional arts were sidelined by scholarly attention; rather they took a critical perspective that worked against frames in which the past was hermetically sealed off from the present.

Art History in post-independence India continues to operate within a broad framework established in the early decades of the twentieth century. The shared logic and complementary disciplinary

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practices of Archaeology-Indology-Museology put in place during the phase of high nationalism determined the contours of the practice of Indian Art History. Consequently, the main thrust of conventional Art History as a pedagogy and as a praxis has been on stylistic analyzes of Indian art, attribution of works to schools, historical periods and artists, dating of works and the establishment of their authenticity with a focus on rarity and the rediscovery of forgotten artists and periods. Further, the detection of forgery, reconstruction of art-objects as well as iconographical and narrative descriptions oriented towards an elucidation of the meaning of Art constitute an important component of Art Historical practice. Notwithstanding its intellectual location within the Social Sciences, it must be emphasised that the conventions of the discipline have been significantly determined by the concerns of the art market on one hand and the practical demands of the allied Archaeology and Museology on the other. Moreover, Indian Art History has, along with Archaeology and Museology, been materially implicated in the project of inventing a "golden" Indian past.

It is now easy to contend that the beginnings of Art History in India were tied to the project of nation making. Decisive contributions were made by E.B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita, Sri Aurobindo, Abananindranath and Rabindranath Tagore who pioneered a specifically modern Indian aesthetic, premised on an imagined tradition of a nationhood defined away from "western" values.[2] While these moves crucially enabled the fashioning of an effective counter to the colonialist dismissal of Indian aesthetic production, they certainly cordoned off the realm of art from the space of the popular. Conventional Art History in post-independence India has never really thought through or broken away from the elitism of the early art historians who, despite their powerful critique of colonialist aesthetics, uncritically took over elitist ideas that privileged "high" art at the expense of folk art.[3] Despite the valorization of the folk and the tribal in the era of Nehruvian socialism and beyond, it is important to recall that the frame through which folk art was invoked remained nationalist and elitist, witness the positioning of rural art/craft in the Festivals of India in the 1980s.[4] That is partly the reason why conventional Art History has been unable to examine its inheritance qua Indology, Archaeology and Museology. Consequently, the study of Indian art, particularly traditional art largely continues to be caught up in conventional methods tied to ever-new archaeological discoveries and the museological tradition of connoisseurship. Political processes and currents that have undergirded Art History in India have not informed such disciplinary analyzes, nor has there been room for ideological understandings of art processes. Therefore, mainstream art historical practice in India has focused on identifying and defining stylistic schools, plotting evolutionary patterns and regional styles, understanding iconographic and narrative conventions and structures, the usage of symbols, the patterns of evolution of decorations and the determination of mutual interaction between schools or their relative autonomy.[5]

'New' Art History in India can be situated in the crisis born out of conventional Art History's dissociation from vital intellectual and philosophical currents.[6] Primarily, critical reflection and the entry of critical theories within the disciplinary matrix of Art History mark new discourses on art.

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For the last three decades and more, art historians from within and outside the field of the Art History have thus opened up new spaces of inquiry and interpretation of art, apart from publications completely focused on theoretical reflection about and conceptual explorations in Art History.[7] One of the central themes in these writings is the exploration of the manner in which critical theory has been deployed in fields such as History, Culture Studies and English Studies in order to understand its implications for the visual arts. The difference between art criticism and art history practices today appears blurred, leading to, what may perhaps be characterised as Critical Art History, or Art Historical Criticism.

The differences between "conventional" Art History and the "new" Art History are crucial, all the more so since the "new" art historian raises critical questions about all the normative assumptions on the production, circulation and consumption of art as well as production of meaning. A key feature of "new" Art History is auto-criticism, in the sense that it is self-reflexive about its own practices. It challenges the prevalent opposition of "High Art" to "non-art" — read popular or mass visual culture — and seeks to study specific visual cultures within the dynamics of historical processes. It questions preconceived notions about meaning in representations, artistic and art historical. It also raises questions about the economic, political and social implications of art that enable the re-situation of Art History among the Social Sciences. "New" Art History surely sees art and its history as intimately linked to the societies that produce and consume it and in the process makes newer and newer meanings. It questions the myth of artist as a solitary genius and heroic persona, and attempts to historicize objects of art rather than envisage them as unique exemplars of style and content. Further on, one can see a concern over the demystification of the camouflaged links between art, scholarship, politics and market. It examines the relation between art, its institutions and the nation state as well as the relational dynamics of the local and the global. It contests earlier claims about the objectivity of scholarship in general and history writing in particular as much as it critiques the valorization of a purely individuated, subjective art criticism.

## II

John Berger and T.J. Clark in the 1970s were among early theorists who investigated the relationship between art and ideology. They opened up space for new objects to be configured within the discipline primarily by raising the issue of class, researching the manner in which works of art become key objects that enable dominant classes to maintain positions of power. Whereas Clark addressed these questions working within the broad parameters of the notions of high art,[8] Berger most violently cracked open the insularity of the field and displaced the hierarchy between fine arts and media images by juxtaposing them in a conceptual montage.[9] To a nascent feminist art history, it was this trajectory made available by Berger that allowed the initial theorisation of gender politics in reciprocal relationship to class politics within Art History. Following feminist interventions in the discipline by Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock among others, the collusion of the elitism of Art History with

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patriarchy became the focus of analysis. The discipline itself was shown to be "a series of representational practices which actively produce definitions of sexual difference and contribute to the present configuration of sexual politics and power relations."[10] These new analytical strategies enabled critical inquiry of art as a social and historical practice, and of Art History as an engagement in the production of critical knowledge of one's history and one's time. Simultaneously, these moves permitted a critical examination of the nationalist beginnings of an Art History tied to issues of privilege and status as in the work of Donald Preziosi and others. Indeed, Preziosi has argued that "art history has been paradigmatic of a certain modernist, panoptic sensibility: a factory for the production of sense for modern western societies" through the "lashing together [of] several nineteenth century dreams of scientificity."[11]

These disciplinary shifts parallel those of other disciplines such as History and English Studies.[12] Equally enabled by the radical possibilities offered by Marxist as much as post-structuralist and postcolonialist thought, they mark the moment when the hegemonic status of the disciplinary edifice has been eroded by claims of hitherto marginalized groups (Dalits, working classes, women, minority groups of various kinds). It is possible, then, to understand these shifts as counter-hegemonic interventions emerging from a range of struggles played out primarily outside academia but also, crucially, within it. Indeed, it can be argued that Art History's entrenched orthodoxy is in part responsible for a multivalent resistance to these ideas within institutional spaces of the discipline.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize significant attempts to critically extend the scope of conventional Art History. The debate around tribal and folk art in the 1980s, with its repercussions even today, is a case in point. J. Swaminathan, in his invocation of tribal art, on and off referred to the historical fact of social transformations and the process of change. He was conscious of questions of tribal identity as well as marginality in the nation-state. However, he was blind to issues of resistance, dissent and protest in tribal art in the service of an ahistorical universalizing formalist aestheticism.[13]

In 1987 the Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association in their manifesto had also made an early and much more radical attempt to look at the condition of Indian tribal/folk art in terms of the historical processes in which they were located. Countering K.G. Subramanyan's nationalist celebration of art and craft practices of village India, the manifesto pointed out that,

> Today in our situation, it is difficult to accept Subramanyan's great nostalgia for the collective practices of proto-capitalist, moribund village and town economies. What is his idea of historical process? When he talks about the potter, the weaver and tribal women as fixed in history with no right to a choice of expression, all in the name of an "eclectic plurality", a grand hierarchic design which should not be disturbed, he speaks with paternal false-humanism of a feudal bourgeoisie. Obviously for him state capitalism and class society are eternal unchanging institutions. Yet,

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> capitalism having destroyed at the root a collective way of life or make a pastiche of the same. . . . Folk art can no longer economically sustain in any honorable fashion, . . . What then is the reason for its survival if not as a political act of resistance against the phenomena of forgetting that capitalism entails. . . .[14]

Although both Swaminathan and Subramanyan were involved with tribal art in ways that allowed the emergence of third world resistance to the cultural hegemony of the west, invigorating and diversifying modern art practice in India, their universalist frame of reference and unproblematic espousal of "high" art foreclosed the analysis of tribal expression *within* the realm of nation.

On the other hand, Jyotindra Jain has worked within the framework of "high" art to overturn conventional hierarchies that leave no room for individuality or excellence of artistic expression to rural/tribal craftspersons. By means of art historical methodology of appointing and legitimizing individual "masters" he constructs an alternative history of contemporary Indian art.[15] Despite the fact that he successfully makes a case for the delineation of tribal and folk artists as creative geniuses equal to the artists of the elite sphere, the glaring disparity of the social and material conditions of their lives gets overlooked. His more recent work does takes note of the historical shifts in patronage, and the influence of modernity in the works of these "timeless" artists, yet the project of appointing "masters" in line with the artists of "high" art bypasses the implications of plucking them out of their communitarian and historical contexts.

Discussions of indigenous and folk art certainly pushed at disciplinary boundaries, yet the allegiance, with the possible exception of Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association, to the broad theoretical framework of a conventional art history limited their usefulness. At best, these discussions have gestured to a social history of art. In the case of pre-modern art, the issues are perhaps more complex at least partly because there is such a radical paucity of information. Often, the formalism and style analysis of conventional art history is defended upon this basis. Those who do study content, whether iconography or narrative, constantly quote from literary sources in the hope of arriving at a fully authenticated meaning. Even those who study variations and evolutions within representation over a period of time — iconology — have a predominantly hermeneutic interest in the analysis.

Nevertheless, there have been significant attempts to draw out socio-historical implications of iconographical-iconological studies. Devangana Desai's study of overt sexual representation in ancient and medieval Indian art, for example, rejects a stylistic and aesthetic approach linked to romantic idealisation and spiritual rationalization.[16] She has argued that sexual representation was associated with fertility as well as its magico-propitiatory and magico-defensive purpose and that medieval regionalism, conventionalism, superstition and irrationalism made it possible to conventionalize the erotic motif. Desai's work charts a journey from the magico-religious-agrarian fertility sphere to their fossilization into the conventions of pleasure and religious symbolism in the medieval period.

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Similarly, Shivaji K Panikkar's work on the *Saptamātṛkās* traces another mode of Brahminical appropriation and fossilization.[17] The coexistence of the aspects of life and death in the motif of seven goddesses in a group, he has shown, is linked to Brahminism's complete appropriation of an earlier disparate materialist tradition by the Brāhmaṇa-Kṣatriya power nexus.

R. Champakalakshmi studied the iconography of deities as material for the study of history.[18] She has argued that iconography provides an important tool for the interpretation of the socio-economic change occurring at macro and micro levels. She has proposed connections between politics and iconographic variations, such as the linkage between Viṣṇu and kingship. Sectarian rivalries among the Hindu cults as well as between Jainism, she has shown, can also be read through an ongoing process of icon formation.

Contesting the Coomaraswamian notion of the anonymous Indian artist-craftsman had been a serious pre-occupation with the younger generation of art historians working in 1970s through to the 1990s. This led to exploring names, lineages and identifying individual artist's contribution in the development of styles of specific regions and schools. R.N. Misra had initiated the study of status of Indian craftsmen of the ancient and early medieval periods. He worked with the conventional art historical method of collating epigraphic data about various categories of artisans, their qualifications, caste characteristics and hierarchical setup in order to critique the Coomaraswamian formulation that ancient Indian artists were uninterested in individual expression.[19] His work opens out, even if it does not directly address, larger questions about artists' social status, individual-subjective expression in a caste stratified society and their role within Brahminical/Sastric politico-religious traditions. Similarly, the work of B.N. Goswamy on the lineage of artists in relation to stylistic developments in the Pahari region suggested new directions.[20] These researches, including those on Mughal artists have been significant contributions in that these can now enable the theorizing of the role of artist with in the larger historical frame of pre-modern times.

Despite these important shifts within conventional Art History, the discipline has remained locked in formulaic argumentation around style and content of art objects, primarily on account of the reverence accorded to the art object thought to embody an aesthetic essence. "New" Art History, in rejecting this essential understanding of the art object, has paved the way for socio-political readings of the aesthetic.

## III

The publication of the first issue of *Journal of Arts and Ideas* in October 1982 marked a major moment in contemporary Art History in India. A whole range of concerns, which today may be viewed as "new" Art History, is prefigured even in the initial years of the publication of the *Journal*. Working with the idea that "there is no magic or mystique in art which would require new Brahmins to set it down in words,"[21] the *Journal* nevertheless held that theoretical rigor was crucial to the study of art. Writing the editorial a little more than a year after the *Journal*'s inception, G.P. Deshpande

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restated its central brief: "We would like to develop an interventionist discourse on the universe of arts and ideas which impinge upon and in many cases determine our cultural and political practice."[22] Traversing multiple terrains of art production and irreverent about standard hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries, contributors to the journal have been art critics and historians, film critics and culture theorists.

The writings of Geeta Kapur, founder and contributing editor of the *Journal*, have reshaped the contours of art history and art writing.[23] Committed to modernity, her theoretical concerns can be located in the problematics of nation:

> I try to tackle the contestatory nature of Indian modernity, pulling the concept away from its conservative version where it is seen as emerging from a respectable lineage that becomes by some ideological miracle the bearer of civilizational values. Equally, modernity has to be saved from the default of underdesignation, that is to say from absentminded neglect of its revolutionary forms of otherness that overhaul modernist principles.[24]

It is this understanding of modernity that structures her delineation of an aesthetic avant-garde that cut across multiple genres of culture production from "high" art to films.

Writing alongside Kapur, indeed many of his articles were published in the *Journal*, Gulammohammed Sheikh's theorization of his own art practice as well his re-examination of medieval Indian art in a manner that made it available for contemporary art practice has also been instrumental in charting new directions in Art History. Breaking with the discipline's telelogical pradigm, Sheikh has forged an art practice in which painting and writing merges into a continuous activity, both equally discursive. Intertwining the past art historical, multi-cultural codes with citations from local urban popular culture, and investing them with contemporary significance, his writings offer a breadth of vision and his critical re-readings of the past constitute a new turn in Indian modernism. To a certain extent, Sheikh's interventions ran roughly parellel to new voices re-examining the disciplinary contours of Indian Art History. In particular, one can mention Partha Mitter's path breaking *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art.*[25]

Tapati Guha-Thakurta has also thematized nation through a highly nuanced and complex engagement with cultural processes surrounding the production of art. A historian by training, Guha-Thakurta's sensitivity to the institutional framing of art historical production and reception has enabled an examination of the interface between institutional location and the production of meaning. She has drawn critical attention to the nationalist underpinnings and ideological nature of Art History as a discipline.[26] Her writings have been instrumental in questioning the authority of received concepts and facilitating the shift from the reified zones of Art History to the domain of our contemporary mass culture. More recently, the publication of *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art*[27] certainly marks on important moment in Indian art historiography. While

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acknowledging the impact of seminal work within western feminist Art History and media studies, it foregrounds the theoretical difficulties specific to the cultural milieu of Indian art practice and the phallocentric/orientalist premises of the representational regimes of the discipline.[28]

## IV

A substantial number of the essays in the volume were presented at the seminar "New Art History and Indian Art," while others have been included to amplify and elaborate particular issues. Several are drawn from the M.A. dissertation projects of the students of the Department. The section headings given in the table of contents broadly suggest the areas covered by the essays. Although the essays range across a variety of objects and themes as well as great spans of time, they are informed by an awareness of the implications of a "new" Art History. The essays in the first Section — Quest for New Frameworks — chart methodological possibilities in a brave, new world. Each of the essays offer a take on the unwieldy, even messy terrain of what we call "new" Art History, not only working against the grain of conventional Art History but also strenuously striving to work out the implications of the methodological praxis available through an engagement with critical theory.

Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha's essay "Visual Culture in an Indian Metropolis" was originally written for the catalogue of a major exhibition *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis* at the Tate Modern in 2001. Mandated to "look at the visual culture of a city in a moment of precipitate change — political and economic as much as cultural change" Kapur and Rajadhyaksha have sought to track "an *aspectual* account" of avant-garde culture in the metropolis. The essay sketches a complex account of Bombay/Mumbai's engagement with an emancipatory modernity through focus on specific moments of the history of the city's visual culture. Kapur and Rajadhyaksha fashion a theory of visuality that can account for "the bodily experience of living in a predominantly visual universe" and can thus enable a reading of a kinetic experience of city — city as history. Similarly, Navjot Altaf's "Contemporary Art, Issues of Praxis and Art-Collaboration: Interventions in Bastar" works with the idea of history in process in its careful detailing of her experience of collaborating with traditional artists from Bastar. While the essay is a richly textured personal narrative tracking essentially urban art practices in a rural Adivasi context, it equally documents rural Adivasi engagement with modernity through a realignment of traditional art practices. In a tangential way, her essay echoes the concerns of Anshuman Das Gupta's "Art History and Art Practice Today: A Question of Interface."

In "Reading the Regional Through Internationalism and Nativism: The Case of Art in Madras; 1950 to 1970," Shivaji K Panikkar examines the manner in which regional experiences of modernity both collude with yet undermine attempts to delineate national histories of art. He demonstrates, through an analysis of art in Madras during 1950 and 1970, the manner in which local/regional histories of art intersect with that of the national as well as the international, inflecting and inflected by these histories. He argues that local, perhaps non-metropolitan histories of art are, in fact,

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constitutive of the contours of a national avant-garde. Structured as a critique of the book *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art* edited by Vidya Dehejia, Parul Dave Mukherji's paper, "Rethinking Gender Issues in Indian Art," offers an analysis of the limits and possibilities of western feminist Art History. Although she has acknowledged the value of the volume in focusing attention on gender as a category of analysis in the study of the traditional or pre-colonial context, Dave Mukherji takes issue with both an uncritical deployment as well as rejection of western feminist Art History. Redeploying the privileged tool in the repertoire of conventional Art History and Indology — Sanskrit texts — she shows how they can sharpen the analysis of gender in Indian art.

As the title suggests, Section II — Patronage in Question — concerns the interface between institutional support for art, the conditions of art production and questions of meaning and value. The politics of patronage across time and the relationship of technique to economic circumstances of art production of the traditional genres of art (painting, sculpture and architecture) receive a special emphasis.

Close attention to the techniques and material has led Baishali Ghosh in "Technique, Time and Form in Ancient Indian Terracotta Sculpture" to problematize Stella Kramrisch's categorization of the tradition of terracotta into "ageless" and "time-bound." She underlines the limitation of such an object-centered method in the study of Indian terracotta as this approach neglects the issue of use-value, function, meaning and patronage. Vaijayanti Shete pursues the issue of monetary transaction between art patrons and the artists in as delineated in the *Śilpa Śāstra*s or the traditional art treatises in "The Socio-Economics of Art in the *Śilpa Śāstra*s." The *Śāstra*s, usually taken to be a dry and pedantic compendium of rules and regulations of art production, surprisingly open up to a new reading in keeping with Michael Baxandall's advice to art historians — "Money is very important in the history of art."[29] Similarly, Jayaram Poduval's paper "Roda Temples: Edifice of Spiritualism or Political Advertisement?" examines the case of Roda group of temples to suggest that temple art was always deeply entrenched in political issues. Poduval does not merely propose that the Roda group of temple monuments in North Gujarat were constructed as a result of the patronage of a particular political dynasty, he argues that art in its formal makeup is structured by political intentions and purposes.

Analyzing the intersection of art practice with patronage and the social location of the artists of the Mughal and Mewar schools of miniature painting, Shailendra Kushwaha points out that they often mirrored the idiosyncratic taste of the patron. However, the content and style of the paintings largely depended on the dominant role of the scribes who chose episodes to be illustrated. Arguing that the logic of the workshop mode engendered a collective consciousness in the Mewar School, Kushwaha nevertheless recognizes the *pratibhā* (creative genius) of the master painters. Focusing on the semiotic structure rather than on individual signatures, Debra Diamond, in her paper "The Poetics and Politics of Citation in Jodhpur Miniatures" argues that court paintings were not mere loci for pleasure or devotion, but rather vehicles for active engagement with claims for power,

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status and legitimacy. Her paper deals with an early nineteenth century Jodhpur painting which is seen as a complex web of cited motifs created by tracing or copying elements of earlier paintings. Examining these traced motifs as culturally shared codes from which historical meanings are re-constructed and re-constituted, she establishes a painterly perspective which manipulates the past for the sake of intertwined purposes of devotion as well as contemporary political strategies.

In Annapurna Garimella's essay "Miracles in the Park: The Design and Politics of a Contemporary Religious Space in Bangalore," art-history-in-practice is contextualized in a contemporary religious space. Addressing the question of patronage in the present time, the paper suggests that religious authority, like the State, has emerged as a key patron of art. The Miracle Park, she argues, stages the politics of religion/class/caste/gender and so, constitutes a Foucaultian heterotopia, enabling a sharp visibility of the social order. Locating disjunctures between an authoritarian imperative to control the field of the visual and its subversion by the audience, she gestures at upper-caste/ middle-class hegemony in cultural politics centered around Dalit identity.

Although the papers in "Citing Formalism and Iconography" rework objects and techniques of conventional Art History, these are put to new purposes and carry the theoretical thrust of analytical frameworks drawn from critical theory. In particular, the essays deploy formalist and iconographical techniques in the interest of a political rather than aesthetic understanding of art objects.

Deepak Kannal suggests, in his essay "History as Allegory: The Bhaja Narratives" that art objects are deeply enmeshed in discourses as varied as history, politics and literature. At one level, Kannal's paper re-reads the narrative panels at the Bhaja caves as historical allegories. At another level, it carries the suggestion that despite the fact that the Indian scholastic tradition had no equivalent to the western concept of history and did not display historical consciousness in the western sense, one can nevertheless tease out historical information from the *Ākhyāyika*s, *Itihāsa*s, *Purāvṛtta*s and *Purāṇa*s. On the other hand, Ajay Sinha examines the question of the agency of architects in shaping the ongoing architectural tradition in the context of his studies of medieval architectural monuments in Karnataka. Working against the practice of writing either a documentary or descriptive architectural history of India involving the location of coherent formal principles and elements that constitute particular regional traditions as well as Kramrischian notions that a temple anywhere and anytime is a manifestation of religious and spiritual symbolism, Sinha suggests that the subjective preference and the mediation of individual architects was crucial to devising newer variations. He has argued that it is not the claim over the individual artist's inner consciousness that is of significance, but the cultural economy of which it is a part.

Taking cues from various stylistic and iconographic groups of sculptures at Shamalaji and nearby sites, Abha Sheth examines an art historically enigmatic within the larger frame of pluralism of regional styles in the post-Gupta phase. However, Sheth engages with the question of artists' guilds in relation to iconographic and stylistic developments. She argues that the cultic shifts do not

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necessarily bring about stylistic changes since artists worked above such affiliations. Through an exploration of the *Sūrsāgar* verse-paintings of Mewar, Rita Sodha has raised the question of "authorship" in a collective context, as a collaboration between patron, the poet, the librarian, the scribe and the artist and even devotees. She argues that the artist superscribed the given text, and therefore, superscribed the given text, and therefore superseded all other concerns. Nevertheless, the question of plurality of meaning is re-addressed from the point of reception and possibilities of alternative and open-ended readings. Interpretation neither becomes a given aspect of the text nor of the painting, but a question of multivalent subjective readings and re-readings at the various nodes of picture production and viewing.

In the context of modern Indian art, it is the plotting of a separate trajectory of the largely marginalised Regional Modern that engages Ashrafi Bhagat. Bhagat explores the development and various ramifications of the trajectory of Abstraction in the Madras art scene since the 1960s arguing that its regional specificity overdetermines an art language that otherwise derives from the international modernism. Recovery of women artists from historiographical amnesia and the counter-hegemonic feminist strategies of contemporary women artists converging upon the body emerges as a significant analytical frame. Savithri Rajeevan visits the paintings of T.K. Padmini to grapple with the implications of her rendering of the female body in a romanticized, modernized language that only gestures tangentially to questions of caste. Shubhalakshmi Shukla focuses on the female body as the site of trauma; reading the work of Nasreen Mohamedi and Anita Dube, also Amrita Sher-Gil, she frames their disparate art in a manner that could offer a possibly feminist lineage of women artists.

The third Section explores the complex relationship between gendered identities, claims of ethnicity and representational regimes ranging across traditional and contemporary arts. In fact, the papers though on diverse topics, most compellingly argue the case for new visuality and effect a shift from the old objects to the new objects of study. Cutting from high temple art to mass media images of television and digital art, visual culture receives a heterogeneous articulation.

Sugata Ray's concern with interpretation and meaning of classical Buddha icons is staged on a terrain of sexuality. Ray enters into the question of its emergence through Buddhist theology, philosophy and the idea of transcendent being that combines the masculine and the feminine into one single inseparable unit by focusing on the softened, graceful and "feminized" Buddha image that was created at Sarnath in AD 470s. Through the analysis of other iconic Buddhas, Ray argues that the language of transcendence was not available in the sculpted male bodies of the earlier periods. Therefore, artists opted for an androgynous body type that infused two visualities based on both the masculine and the feminine.

In "The New Antiquity of 'Tamil' Temples: Constructing Identities through Architecture" Shriya Sridharan reads modern day temples in Tamil Nadu as sites of cultural politics. While Sridharan does work out a conventional art historical formalist analysis to account for the stylistic eclecticism

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of the temples, she is faced with their inadequacy in addressing the visual culture of the present-day Chennai. Indeed, the formal analysis of the various parts of the temple complex takes on political implications when we are invited to read them within the context of the Dravidian movement. Apparently insignificant architectural details assume importance when viewed as culturally loaded signifiers of ethnic identities which are the basis for larger identitarian claims. If Sridharan enters the arena of public culture on the basis if an art historical agenda, Karin Zitzewitz's "On Signature and Citizenship: Further Notes on the 'Husain Affair' " offers a sustained account of the life and work of M.F. Husain, presented here as preeminently "the artist who speaks for the nation." Her project, however, is to tease out the implications that the 1996 right wing attack on Husain might have for the theorization of national space. It is across a systematic interrogation of the episode that Zitzewitz maps an art historical concern about signature with public debate about citizenship.

Meena Singh offers an account of caste hierarchies modernizing through encounters with State policy on art promotion. She focuses on culture politics grounded in caste hierarchy in her "Subalternism in the Studies of Indian Art: An Argument in Relation to Dusadh 'Madhubani' Paintings." The strength of her arguments lie in the manner in which she lays out complicated caste dynamics in Madhubanī district in Bihar and underlines the marginal status of "low" caste painters within the historiography of folk art and the transactions of state patronage. Although Madhuvanthi Anantharaman delineates folk elements as a part of her study of the of *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī*, her interest lies in understanding the implications of the new visual culture of the urban collective celebrations in contemporary India.

Vellachi Ramanathan's essay, "Identity, Discourse and Hybridity — an Analysis of Music Television (MTV) Imagery" tracks the visual culture of mass media. She argues that MTV imagery has strategically reconstituted an Indian identity across the cultural crisis structured by liberalization at least partly by means of a complex intertextuality that links the television images to popular Hindi cinema. Nandini Gandhi's essay on digital art invokes intertextuality in a different mode. Constantly moving across Indian Art History in backward and forward movements from the vantage point enabled by digital technology, she shakes up long cherished notions of art and aesthetics. Revisiting traditional landmarks of Indian art via the logic of web-narrativity, a radically heterogeneous ordering of space, she reassesses their significance. Viewed through the "window" of hypermediacy as opposed to the Albertian window, familiar examples of Indian art yield new meanings in their multiple organization of parts and relation to the whole. In fact, she finds further support in reading web-narrativity on Indian theories of meaning and epistemology particularly *sphoṭa* and *ākāṅkṣā* by Bhartṛhari and Vedāntins.

The final Section — Institutional Sites of 'Indian' Art — marks a break from an object centered approach to the institutional frameworks that situate art objects within the fraught terrains of museums and galleries. It addresses the location of art objects within the discursive frameworks constituted by nationalism, identity, and gender across conflicting claims of class, caste and ethnicity. Kavita

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Singh, for example, challenges the canonization of sculpture, painting and architecture as major genres of fine arts in India. She traces the career of Indian artifacts in exhibitions and museums: from being ethnological objects they came to embody the spirit of the country through an ironic collusion of the colonial and the national. Analysis of the historicity of genre formation she suggests could facilitate a search for an alternative classification that incorporates a multiplicity of artefacts within canonical spaces.

Tapati Guha-Thakurta focuses on the ways in which the sexualized feminine figure comes to be rendered into a central canonical motif of Indian art. Working against the monumentality of art heritage sites, she illustrates the manner in which meaning is produced historically and contextually; she shows how what was once thought of as a site of shame came to be seen as a site of celebration. Her key concern is to look into the representational and narrative regime of Indian Art History — to plot the ways in which the subject of the erotic feminine form comes to be configured within the disciplinary and institutional practices of Indian art history over time. In a somewhat different take on the institutionalized spaces of Art History, Deeptha Achar tracks the category "craft" in early art historical writings as well as in discourses on national education. She explores the intersection of craft and caste to probe the implications of such an intersection for disciplinary frameworks of both art history and education. Similarly, R. Srivatsan examines the interface between the institutional sites of law enforcement, photography and the citizen subject.

Rahul Bhattacharya has examined the unstable meanings of objects framed in museum spaces. He, like Vidya Shivadas, analyzes the ideological enterprise that underwrote museological ventures in and about India. Shivadas, however, has focused particularly on the National Gallery of Modern Art. Describing the museum as a space where a national self-imagination was expressed, she traces the fraught contours of the beginnings of the museum largely through a study of its changing acquisition policies whose ideological underpinnings were implicated in the practice of art and Art History. Gauri Parimoo Krishnan's paper, in a crucial way, supports Bhattacharya's and Shivadas's central arguments. The paper delineates curatorial decisions made by Parimoo Krishnan to amplify the central brief of the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore: "It is intended for all Asians and for all those who want to understand Asia. We should establish such a museum because Singapore is a center of Asian cultures with a remarkable mix of races, languages and religions." The essay clearly demonstrates the manner in which Parimoo Krishnan's position on Indian pre-history, History and Art History impinge upon the display at the South Asia Gallery.

One last word: this is a volume of essays in the honour of Prof. Ratan Parimoo. A distinguished art historian, he has been vital to the development of the Department of Art History and Aesthetics at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, particularly its rich archive. We carry his article "Iconography through Iconology to New Art History." The inclusion of his work serves to contextualize "new" Art History: his work exemplifies a gradual shift away from conventional Art History towards an engagement with semiotics and post-structuralism.

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4. See, for example, Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother Legends, Goddesses and Ritual Arts of India*, Harper and Row, New York, 1990. Nancy Adajania has pointed out, the distinction and primacy of "High Art" over the craftsmanly art has remained throughout, and the creative exchanges across the divide has always remained within the mode exploitative co-opting. 'Art and Craft — Bridging the Great Divide', *The Art News Magazine of India*, vol. 4.1, (January-March 1999) pp. 34-38.
5. Tapati Guha-Thakurta writes 'The art-historical discipline in India, we find, has remained largely unconcerned about the ways in which it has constituted its object of knowledge. Over the years, the intricacies of its claims and conclusions have kept invisible the sites and modes of its productions. What we have been faced with is an awesome framework of historical periods, stylistic sequences, dynastic and regional schools, and interrelated genres: a framework that is being continually refined from within.' 'Introduction', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 30-31 (December 1997), p.4.
6. Unlike Art History, art criticism in India takes a rather different route. At least from 1960s art criticism radically differs from the methodologies of traditional Art History. Developing in tandem with modern art practices, the practice of art criticism have stayed close to the various trends in modern Indian art such as the Progressive, Indigenist and Postmodernist schools. As a result, art criticism has been able to move away from the insulated position taken by conventional Art History. For instance, it is easy to see today feminist, post-structuralist as well as other modes of art criticism in India. Culture studies as a growing area of interest has further widened the scope of art criticism today. Problematic as they may be, the various modes surely represent the more productive ideas today.
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10. .Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art' (1988), *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Eric Fernie, Phaidon, London, 1995, p. 308.
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12. Key publications marking this paradigm shift in English Studies in the Anglo-American academy include Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Re-Thinking English: Essays on Literature and Criticism in Higher Education*, Methuen, London, 1982; Raymond Williams, 'Crisis in English Studies' and 'Beyond Cambridge English', *Writing in Society*, Verso, London, 1985, pp. 177-91 and 212-28. Also, the special number of *College Literature* on 'The Politics of Teaching Literature', vol. 17, nos 2 and 3 (1990). For an early example of such a shift in History, see Hayden White, *Metahistory*, John Hopkins University, Baltimore Press, 1973. Also, Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,

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13. Swaminathan, in his catalogue for the an exhibition at Rupankar Museum of Folk and Ādivāsī Art at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal asserted that tribal art is timeless, spiritual and visionary; see *The Perceiving Fingers*', Catalogue of Roopankar Collection of Folk and Adivasi Art from Madhya Pradesh, India, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, 1987.
14. Anita Dube, *Questions and Dialogue* Exhibition catalogue article, Faculty of Fine Arts Gallery, Baroda,1987.
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23. Tapati Guha-Thakurta acknowledges this in her review of Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Critical Practice in India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2000. She says 'For the past three decades, hers has been the singular dominant presence in the field — to the point that her writings alone seem to have constituted the whole field of modern Indian art theory and practice.' *Biblio* (May-June 2001), p. 12.
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27. Vidya Dehejia (ed.), *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1997.

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28. Alongside the publication of *Journal of Arts and Ideas* through the 1980s and 1990s and *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art* and the body of work by Geeta Kapur and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, there have been several somewhat scattered initiatives to engage with the challenge offered by critical theory and to open out disciplinary praxis in a manner that could account for the politics of its own history. For example, see Gary Michael Tartakov 'Art and Identity: Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery', *Art Journal*, Winter 1990, pp. 409-16; Christopher Pinney, 'Nation (Un)pictured: Chromolithography and 'Popular' Politics,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 834-67; Kajri Jain, 'Producing the Sacred: The Subjects of Calendar Art', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 30-31, December 1997, pp. 63-88. The *Marg* Special Issue on Sculpture flattens out hierarchical relations obtaining between 'high' and 'popular' sculpture; *Marg, Special Issue on Twentieth Century Indian Sculpture: Last Two Decades*, ed. Shivaji Panikkar, vol. 52, no. 1, September 2000. Certainly these initiatives are closely associated with developments in film studies in India; see, for example, MSS Pandian, *The Image Trap: MG Ramachandran in Film and Politics*, Sage, New Delhi, 1992; Madhava Prasad, 'Cinema and the Desire for Modernity', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 25-26, December 1993, pp. 71-86; Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Film as Popular Art in India', *Framework*, nos. 32-33, 1986.
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# Part I
# Quest for New Frameworks

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1

# Visual Culture in an Indian Metropolis

*Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha*

## Prefatory Notes

1. The authors wish to acknowledge the original publication context of this essay. See Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'Bombay/Mumbai 1992-2001' in Iwona Blazwick (ed.), *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis*, Tate Publishing, London, 2001.

This publication accompanied a major exhibition titled *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis* at the Tate Modern in 2001. The project set out to examine key moments of cultural creativity in nine cities across the world on the following premise: that at different times in different places through the twentieth century, the energy of the modern metropolis peaked to produce a cultural explosion when the arts flourished in a dynamic and radical interchange. The reasons for these creative flashpoints are diverse, but each city, at its particular time, can be seen to have become a crucible drawing artists from the city and other regions into an artistic and intellectual ferment.

Implicit in the brief from the Tate Modern — that the curators look at the visual culture of a city in a moment of precipitate change — political and economic as much as cultural change — was a more challenging proposition. Or that is how several of the curators interpreted it. What was to be figured through the crucible of the metropolis was an *aspectual* account of avant-garde culture in the twentieth century. Unlike hundreds of manoeuvres around the concept of the western avant-garde, this project saw the flashpoints spark off in different parts of the globe at different moments in the twentieth century. The historical avant-garde, in other words, was placed where it correctly belongs: in the *historical* dynamic of several, widely spread, specifically marked regions/places/sites/cities.

Through a dialogue between the Tate and the invited curators, the cities and periods included were: Paris 1905-15 curated by Serge Fauchereau; Vienna 1908-18 curated by Richard Calvocoressi and Keith Hartley; Moscow 1916-30 curated by Lutz Becker; Rio de Janeiro 1950-64 curated by Paulo Venancio Filho; Lagos 1955-70 curated by Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe; Tokyo 1967-73 curated by Reiko Tomii; New York 1969-74 curated by Donna De Salvo; London 1990-2001 curated by Emma Dextor; Bombay/Mumbai 1992-2001 curated by Geeta Kapur and Ashish Rajadhyaksha.

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2. Our curatorial proposition for the exhibition Bombay/Mumbai 1992-2001 claimed that no Indian city occupies the nation's popular imagination like Bombay;[1] that this island-city, home to 12 million Indians representing numerous regional groupings and an unprecedented industrial and working-class culture, continues to represent the concept 'nation' in all its complexity; but, further, that India's first capitalist city now seeks globalization along the escalated trajectories of transnational finance.

The proposition further marked a political moment, asserting that in the aftermath of the communal riots of 1992-93 an unprecedented polarization of classes and communities had ruptured the cultural fabric of the city: the very title, Bombay/Mumbai 1992-2001, referred to that phenomenon. Bombay alludes to a colonial past, an industrial metropolis, a cosmopolitan modernity. The city's official name since 1995 — Mumbai — stresses a new indigenism.

The actual exhibition sought to reveal the embattled visual culture of India's leading metropolis through paintings, sculptures, installations, photography, video, film and architecture. These works were selected and commissioned, annotated and configured to interpret the cultural dynamic of the secular; indeed the exhibition, placed within that struggle, presented contemporary artworks pivoted as signs in the city's persistent desire to transform.

3. While reprinting our catalogue essay (here retitled 'Visual Culture in an Indian Metropolis'), it may be worth recontextualizing some of the larger concerns that featured in the writing of the original essay and which, punctually foregrounded, can acquire particular relevance within the publication context of the present anthology, *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*. These prefatory remarks gesture at the conceptual framework within which issues of visual culture may be raised; by implication they extend the scope and politicize the study of art history and cultural theory.

The catalogue essay focused on a decade in Bombay's history: the 1992-93 riots, followed by Bombay's determined bid to globalize its financial trade that linked-up, in turn, to the ensuing rise of a distinct cultural economy of consumption. *This, we suggested, had foundationally changed the visual culture of that city.*

One of the connections that the authors of this essay recognized in the earliest drafts was the link that needed to be made between the art produced in the city with a theory of visuality, a visuality that needed to be seen as the *bodily experience* of living in a predominantly visual universe, including in this the entire paraphernalia of looking, noticing, encountering, perceiving, watching, being distracted, impacted. Further, that such experience was central to the practice of living in modernity, so to say; that the privileged site of such visually determined modernity was the city. The claim that such a chain of links would make — and which this essay would seek to argue in the specific instance of the city of Bombay — would be that certain forms of urban living appear to especially foreground conditions where the politics of the visual lies within the capacity of such

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experience to function on an extra-verbal plane, one that could also masquerade as extra-ideological or 'obvious' experience. And here one must emphasize the fact of experience, of being 'inside the narrative', as against what Martin Jay would call a "de-narrativisation or de-textualization" element of the "resolutely ocularcentric" gaze privileged by modernist art history.[2] It became, the authors felt, as much the business of art making to explore these links through a pitching of artistic practice itself into the fray, as it became the business of art history to reposition art within systems of cultural production determined far more by the social sites of this production than by generic considerations.

In exploring the privileging of such visual experience within the dynamics of *metropolitan* space, it may be worth recalling Walter Benjamin's early link between the deeply ambiguous condition of the denizen of the city and its relationship between the dream, the commodity and eventually of historical materialism itself. "Ambiguity", writes Benjamin,

> is the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity *per se*: as fetish. Such an image is presented by the arcades, which are house no less than street. Such an image is the prostitute — seller and sold in one.[3]

Benjamin of course described this denizen as the "*flâneur*" (later also the "sandwichman"), but the present essay has preferred to privilege a narrative of melodrama and thus to propose the idea of a 'protagonist' of the city, the local, the *insider*. While the most prominent such figure would be the city's Dalit poet, such a presence has also been invoked by several artists, filmmakers and writers.

The crucial (Benjaminian) shift here is, perhaps, the way that the emphasis on experiencing the visual in turn emphasized the subjective condition of the 'one who describes', as against the thing described. A central concern was to locate *this* condition of the artist-insider, where to describe your circumstances also meant to lay a claim to citizenship, even as the description in turn laid a parallel claim to realism. Perhaps the single most significant aspect of focusing on Bombay was the extent to which its artists, its poets and its filmmakers, laid bare what we called the 'naked truth of the citizen-subject', defining their realism as a claim to modernity, and making that determined move a matter of their political right.

If one crucial point in the axis was the subject (the artist-citizen), and another the mode of description (realism), the third point of the triad was the contemporary city described (to borrow a phrase from architect and city-historian Rahul Mehrotra) as a 'kinetic' experience: *city as history*. It seemed crucial to locate, in the very fabrication of the everyday, the planning that has gone into both the formal as well as informal sectors (the slums) of Bombay city. And, in turn, to recognize in this history of planning a century or more of the city's aspirations, both political and economic. The looming presence of the late nineteenth century and the division of the colonial from the native city,

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the history of the textile industry and the dockyards devolving into the politics of land use and developer interests as these featured in the 1992-93 riots — this history establishes the span, the structuring of visuality for the urban phenomenon under study.

It is our contention that the necessary basis for any extended study of visual culture is not only more than a sum of the various arts, but also more than a sociological 'case study' of an Indian metropolis. The conceptual framework for such a study has to configure a set of theses about culture understood to be deeply imbric ated in the discourse of citizenship.

## BOMBAY/MUMBAI 1992-2001

### Arriving in Bombay

A possible start to this essay could be Bombay's Hindi cinema in one of its epochal moments: the beginning of Raj Kapoor's film *Shri 420* (1955), heralding the arrival of a fictional immigrant to the city of Bombay. With his cloth bundle on a stick, Raj, the fabled tramp, enters the city singing a song that was to become a perennial favourite: 'My shoes are Japani, my trousers Englistani, the red cap on my head is Russi yet my heart is Hindustani.'

The Indian State is less than five years old, the Indian nation still, therefore, in the process of formation when Raj arrives at Bombay's doorstep to pawn his honesty medal. The song's ironic, affectionate reference to Nehru's nationalist *modernism* — the right that the newly formed nation gave to its citizens to view the world as a benign, and in political terms non-aligned, affiliation — comes, significantly, from an ingenuous migrant to the metropolis.

Bombay's famed film industry offers numerous allegories of survival. Radical theatre workers and poets came to this city during the 1940s and 1950s, many of them displaced during the country's Partition, to become actors, directors, script-and-song writers. They were celebrated and also assimilated, for survival meant negotiating with a growing industry. This was the period when the post-war boom in industry and real estate demolished the more stable studio systems of the pre-war period, when film production in India more than doubled, and Indian cinema marked an achievement unparalleled in the third world's cinema history by setting up a national market for a national culture industry virtually independently of State support.

This film industry also developed a distinct narrative mode that has since been theorized as nationalist melodrama: Bombay's freshly acculturated artists provided a language of exchange for the rest of India — images, prose, songs and sheer *rhetoric* that is about arriving, about survival.

It is in the melodramatic mode that Bombay cinema delivers the city to the Indian public. It is also in the peculiar promise of Bombay that this cinematic genre continues to serve a paradigmatic function: intertwined stories of faith, corruption, love, betrayal help mediate the anguish of a transition from country to city, from feudal to capitalist modes of production. Melodrama engages with the

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civil society that ensues in the transition; at the same time it promotes subjectivity, among other things through an identification with the highly wrought personae of the stars. In replacing the sacred icon with the beloved, melodrama plays a role in giving the country's internal 'exiles' a hold on their experience of modernity. It also means that Bombay melodrama, featuring modern consciousness as a painful *mastering* of life in the metropolis, becomes ideologically complicit with the male protagonist.

**Survivors' Modernity**

Here is also a clue about how the existential position of a metropolitan rebel becomes Indian modernism. Take Francis Newton Souza. Goan Catholic by birth, he came to Bombay with his working-class mother, studied at the Sir J. J. School of Art, founded the Bombay Progressive Artists Group in 1947, then migrated to London. Here he became a volatile 'native'-modernist of his time:

> Then my mind began to wander into the city I was bred in: Bombay with its stinking urinals and filthy gullies, its sickening venereal diseased brothels, its corrupted municipality, its Hindu colony and Muslim colony and Parsee colony, its bug ridden Goan residential clubs, its reeking, mutilating and fatal hospitals, its machines, rackets, babbitts, pinions, cogs, pile drivers, dwangs, farads and din.[4]

Souza's version of 'outsider' modernism can be set against locally pitched forms of modernism such as that of the Marathi playwright from Bombay, Vijay Tendulkar. Introducing a form of urban social realism in theatre in the late 1950s, Tendulkar created a space that his existential anti-hero of the middle class could inhabit. In the plays *Gidhade* (1962) and *Sakharam Binder* (1971) he developed an idiom that spoke of class and caste transgression and touched the territory rightfully occupied by the Dalits.[5]

The Dalit liberation movement produced an explosive form of Marathi literature in the 1970s. Dalit poets like Namdeo Dhasal, defining their bind with metropolitan space, gave Bombay its wager for a caste war:

> Their Eternal Pity no taller than the pimp on Falkland Road
> No pavilion put up in the sky for us.
> Lords of wealth, they are, locking up lights in those vaults of theirs.
> In this life, carried by a whore, not even the sidewalks are ours.[6]

The Dalits writers spoke about how you arrived in Bombay to escape the civilizational malaise of 'untouchability'. To do so you had to preserve but as likely to win a subjectivity and forge a modernity that could grasp it. And, certainly, you had to invent your citizenship since nobody else was going to do it for you. In the metropolitan encounter, in the struggle to inherit the city, you came face to face with the naked truth of the 'citizen-subject' in India. Or, as Baburao Bagul writes in his best

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known short story: "This is Bombay. Here men eat men. And Death is Getting Cheaper."[7]

**Bombay 1992**

In December 1992 and January 1993, Bombay raged with a spate of 'communal' riots on a scale it had never seen before. The cataclysmic events of these months were foundational: Bombay became the stage for acting out fierce contradictions in the nation's encounter with modernity.

These riots followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid (the sixteenth-century mosque situated in the northern city of Ayodhya) by right wing pro-Hindutva fanatics. This pivotal event in India's political sphere had nationwide consequences. In Bombay the motivated intensity of the riots so crucially transformed the city's complex melange of local, national and transnational groupings that the moment could be seen to mark the end of Bombay's century-old cosmopolitanism.

In the aftermath of the riots, the evidence of the Srikrishna Commission appointed by the state government for an inquiry proved that the Shiv Sena was largely responsible.[8] Since its formation in 1966, the Shiv Sena, an explicitly anti-Communist labour grouping, has had a history of strikes, riots and violence against a range of minorities, including Gujaratis, Muslims, south Indians and Dalits. In the 1992-93 riots, the murder and arson directed against the city's Muslim population raised the larger question of the extraordinary fragility of civil society: in January 1993, 150,000 people fled the city that proudly claims to be India's financial capital.[9]

The reprisals that followed — serial bomb blasts in March 1993 in some of the city's key business centres — suggested that religious difference was only one among the motivations for violence. A gamble had been set apace by the majority community to settle territorial disputes in the city: real estate criminals, smuggling mafias, rivalries within the trade unions, conflicts over caste and region had ignited the riots.

**Bombay/Mumbai: Industrial City**

In 1995, a year after the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party government took over power in Maharashtra state, the city's name was formally changed from the colonial 'Bombay' to its vernacular version, 'Mumbai'. This seemingly innocuous move was contextualized by the riots and the rise of a xenophobic nationalism. There is irony here: the Shiv Sena's Mumbai is a city that has pushed its corporate status over the threshold into globalization. Here is a an island city, home to 12 million[10] Indians, rejecting its more capacious cultural cosmopolitanism while bidding for a place in the path of global finance moving eastward from New York and London to Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai.

Bombay was a major industrial metropolis of the colonial world from the middle of the nineteenth century. The elaborate infrastructure that was put in place by the British colonial power — a mercantile ethos modernized by the establishment of dockyards, cotton mills and the *legendary* Indian Railways — induced complex moves in native trade and manufacture culminating in the establishment of the

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Indian textile industry offering competition to Lancashire itself. This produced a class of indigenous industrialist-entrepreneurs who later aspired to the condition of a bourgeoisie in its fullest sense and cast a determining gaze upon the city and the nation.

This same infrastructure — then and ever since — became the means of arrival for a working population that gradually gave Bombay its proletarian base. The division of the colonial city into White and Black Towns translates into ever more confrontational polarities in the contemporary city; class divisions can be plotted in the way that the three local railway lines still divide the city into its white collar employees (who take the coastal Western Railway line), textile workers (who use the Central Railway which goes through the heart of the mill areas), and workers who use the Harbour Line (recalling Bombay's ancestry as a port city).

Within the context of its highly articulated class structure, Bombay lays claim to the origins of the labour movement and, from the 1940s, to the activity of the Communist Party of India. The city's history can be marked by famous trade union strikes. The crucial textile sector, dominated by a negotiating Congress Party trade union, saw a retaliatory strike in 1982-83; led by an independent militant, it became the longest, most tragic labour struggle in India. Huge mills closed down and an estimated 75,000 workers lost their jobs.[11] With escalating real estate speculation, another kind of immigrant labour has poured into the city as construction workers living like nomads on building sites. The two dominant categories of the working class coalesced after 1983 when mill owners made their profits through selling the land on which they were built, forcing workers back to their villages or into 'casual' daily-wage labour. Meanwhile, the disputes over mill lands, spilling over into conflicts between workers' rights versus property developers' interests, highlight the stark reality of Bombay where an estimated 5 million people — 55 per cent of the city's population — live in 'illegal' slums, interspersed with properties on prime land that counts with the most expensive real estate in the world.

**Bombay Modernism: 1940s to 1990s**

The modernism manifest in the work of Bombay's writers, artists and filmmakers from the 1940s is directly related to the actual experience of metropolitan modernity. We argue that the ability to describe the experience springs, paradoxically, from an underlying realm of realism. In India, as often in other parts of the third world, modernity does not precipitate itself into the modernist canon. Familiar aesthetic categories of the modern — realism and modernism — gain complicity on strange ground. It is their peculiar form of overlapping that requires to be taken into account, not only for understanding specific types of cultural praxis but for large-scale revisions in the history of modernism and of metropolitan culture in the twentieth century.

This paradox is also part of the explanatory method we adopt to designate the epochal transition from colonial to postcolonial society. Within this explanation we introduce the term 'subaltern' and elicit from the compressed history of its use in radical discourse (in the subaltern studies

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historiography of modern India), a figure subordinated in the social hierarchy but valorized in theory. The figure is a means of description and, as Gayatri Spivak puts it in her explication of the term and the processes it instigates, as the site for the "production of 'evidence', the cornerstone of historical truth."[12]

The term subaltern is specifically used in this essay to designate (*not* the peasant but) a dispossessed urban-insider embodying potential agency. We indicate how the metropolitan artist, in the moment of identification with this protagonist, can signal every facet of modern life in the city; how this process can then proliferate and become generative of modernism. Equally, seen from a slightly different angle, the modern itself can seem to be elusive, missing, absent. For indeed the modern *here* is always seen as being *elsewhere*, typically of course in the 'West'. And the consequent form of cultural modernism, functioning in unexpected ways around the sense of lack, can be especially befuddling to those who seek ordered categories in practice and in theory.

One straight marker of modernist practice is the Progressive Artists Group launched in Bombay in 1947 by Francis Newton Souza, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, K.H. Ara and others. Later affiliates to Bombay's modernist ideology included V.S. Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee and Tyeb Mehta. Though the Group disbanded when some of its members moved to Paris and London in the 1950s, this post-Independence generation of Bombay artists has retained a vanguard status in the chronicle of modern Indian art. They are seen to have mastered the cultural and economic struggle of being Indian while at the same time inducting this experience into the universalist utopia dreamt up by modernists everywhere in the world. It is significant that in India this utopia was envisioned precisely at the point when the Second World War had destroyed the engagement with utopia in western Europe leaving the socialist and the Third World to work out the concept in their own terms.

If we bring the modernism of the Bombay Progressives into the 1990s by presenting Tyeb Mehta's recent morphology of his modernist-figurative painting and place this *vis-à-vis* the realist paintings of a younger, Marxist, painter, Sudhir Patwardhan, we will set-up one important paradigm for the politics of (self) representation in Indian art. In the last two decades Tyeb Mehta has introduced a mythological element into his oeuvre by painting Kali, the dark goddess of death and resurrection, followed by a series on the theme of the buffalo-demon, Mahishasura, vanquished by the golden goddess Durga. These images are drawn from an indigenous (arguably pre-Aryan) past; they are imbedded in the material culture of India's sub-continental tribes. Mehta's heterodox use of mythology creates contemporary allegories around the role of the 'cultural outsider'. He gives the contestatory figure an iconic stance in the secular culture of modern India. Sudhir Patwardhan also works with the insider-outsider question but, in contrast to Mehta, he disinvests his painted image of the mythic aura to make secular identity an everyday phenomenon. Patwardhan establishes contiguity between the artist, viewer and the proletarian body on plain civic ground. From this classic-realist position he raises putatively postmodern questions about the politics of location (*Pl.* 2).

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Raghubir Singh's splendid colour photographs (as for example the series titled *Bombay: Gateway to India*) also present a double-take on the realist genre. Even as he framed punctual encounters of workers, traders, entrepreneurs to show how they fuel the city-engine, Singh grasped the strange undertow in metropolitan reality — the dread of oblivion. Sharing something of the mythology of the Asian-city-as-spectacle, the photographs show Bombay as a crammed coloured cosmos revealing itself in a frontal, wide-angle view (*Pl.* 1). The pictures are often literal (glass and mirror) reflections that refract the spectacle into multiple views and all but shatter it. Thus deploying strategic framing devices of a modernist aesthetic (based especially on the use of colour and ornament) Singh, like many eminent Indian artists, opts to *condense* and *contain* the chaos, the kitsch and the conflicting class interests within the city.

India's independent cinema movement shows, further, how a calibrated relationship between realism and modernism helps to produce a compassionate and, in its own way, radical iconography. Developing from the militant politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s — which included the extreme-Left (Naxalite) movements, repressive State action in the form of the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, and the democratic resurgence in its aftermath, including the entry of the Dalits in national electoral politics — a slew of films set in contemporary Bombay assimilated and transformed the pressure of the insurgencies in Indian society.

Films like Avtar Kaul's *27 Down* (1973), Saeed Mirza's *Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai* (1980), *Mohan Joshi Hazir Ho!* (1983) and *Saleem Langde Pe Mat Ro* (1989), Sudhir Mishra's *Dharavi* (1991) set themselves the task of engaging with the national agenda for cinematic realism while critiquing its Statist ideology. At the same time they critiqued the mainstream Bombay cinema flaunting its mass 'public' but assimilated the melodramatic devices that oddly spelt modernity. It is through a continued transaction between these two cinematic languages that India's independent cinema found a mode to articulate social contradictions. Kumar Shahani's avant-garde melodrama *Tarang* (1984) played out a classic conflict where the bourgeoisie — locked in a tussle between its feudal, nationalist and globalizing constituents — confronts a fractious working class divided along uncannily similar faultlines.

## Urban Morphology

In order to situate the culture of this metropolis in relation to its infrastructure, we need to signpost the enormously impressive project of colonial modernization.[13] With its industry, civic infrastructure, and grand Victorian profile; with its 1930s Art-Deco modernism giving the city a flamboyant cosmopolitan style, Bombay was a model for cities in the British empire. Faced with its historical self-image as an 'urban crucible', contemporary planners and citizens working towards a democratic restructuring of the city's social fabric run into problems of determining authority, style, and priorities: between restoration and development, and further between the interests of well-entrenched classes with pressing claims.

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One way to understand the postcolonial phenomena in Bombay is to premise the discourse on national ideology that claims to harbour its own conditions and style of modernity; that claims indeed to give modernism the mandate of social praxis starting at the ground level of poverty. For Charles Correa, Bombay's (and India's) leading modernist architect and planner, his practice has meant eliciting State interventions in city planning, prefiguring large-scale urban expansion, finding solution to the problems of explosive population growth and narrow traffic corridors.[14] He now extends his understanding to the city's unstructured dynamic:

> Every day (Bombay) gets worse and worse as a physical environment . . . and yet better as a city. [E]very day it offers more in the way of skills, activities, opportunity — on every level, from squatter to college student to entrepreneur to artist . . . here are a hundred different indications emphasizing that impaction (implosion!) of energy and people [really is] a two-edged sword . . . destroying Bombay as an environment while it intensifies its qualities as a city. . . .[15]

It is a common contention that postcolonial Bombay has few modernist buildings worth the name. Notwithstanding the row upon row of public and private high-rises, it barely offers the kind of contemporary architectural vision that could transform the city's current self-image as anything but squalid, sprawling tenements and slums. What there is in the name of glamour in contemporary Bombay is the vast area of land reclamation with its glittering mass of high-rises built in the 1970s along the southern tip of Bombay's Nariman Point and Cuffe Parade. Most of the city's architect-planners agree that this is the corrupt face of Bombay's modernism; it show-cases the sinister nexus between State politicians and builders' lobbies working in total disregard of the city regulations and citizens' interests.

With the State mandate on public planning rapidly receding in the face of economic liberalization; with the city bourgeoisie disinvesting itself of industry, a speculators' economy contemptuous of both the State and the working class comes to the fore. The signs for this can be picked up — not only from the operations of the land mafia — but from the practice of architects who design signatured buildings and developers' housing estates for the new-rich by the kilometer. The high-rises designed by Hafeez Contractor offer a pastiche of surface/façade in an apparently postmodern manner. In effect they are styled to convert the constraint of the city's spatial economy into a seductively packaged lifestyle. Today, with a definitive shift in the city towards real estate gambles, Bombay leads upbeat India (where a 200 million-strong upwardly-mobile middle class dreams of making it in the globe) into the beginnings of a postmodern fantasy.

And, yet, Bombay continues to be a city where the interests of slum and pavement dwellers, represented by architect-activists, by a range of political groups and NGOs, remain as prominent as those of land-owners.[16] Urbanists contend that the very survival of even so besieged a city as Bombay is located in the heart of its so-called slums where no dwelling rights are available to

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citizens but which are nevertheless sites of intensive production — of labour, services, and small-scale industry — symbiotically related to the city's infrastructure. It is hardly surprising that Dharavi, Asia's largest slum, is inducted into Bombay's globalizing economy. To reckon with Bombay we have to begin where the middle-class city and its routine definitions of modernism end; where the other city takes over: a city lodged in the interstices of the wealthy city; a 'kinetic city' in the words of Bombay's architect-historian Rahul Mehrotra.[17] A city in perpetual movement, suggesting an entire subterranean economy of transactions between people, produce and capital.

## Globalization and Visual Culture

A decade before the 1992-93 riots, Bombay had already embarked upon its course of economic and cultural globalization. As the effect of the riots gradually subsided, this entire episode came to be seen as no more than an interruption to the city's apparently 'larger' agenda — of linking up with the global economy. What is most of interest here is the evidence of a series of shifts that took place in the *visual culture* of the city.

Pledged to the task of globalization, a new entrepreneurial class has increasingly demonstrated its visual presence in the city. For the first time in independent India, the presence of multinationals deploying new technologies in advertising dominates the streets. Enormous, digitally printed posters have all but wiped out hand-painted hoardings — only a few studios like Balkrishna Arts survive. Triggering an unprecedented consumerism, they are matched by an increase in shopping malls. Relentless ad campaigns celebrate on a global ticket, electronic gizmos, film stars, Indian beauty queens, MTV videos, *et al*. The new media blitz on daily desires produces spectacles, distancing the newly-assembled consumers from the very city they inhabit. The sweeping flyovers smooth over the rough edges of the city slums and provide the symbolic virtue of speed to the outside investors.

On the other hand, there is the dominance over the political space of representation by the Shiv Sena, evident in its own posters, hoardings and street-corner notice boards. This effectively splits the visual experience on the street into two spheres, each with safely demarcated signifying territories. Indeed there is complicity evident in the way the globalizers and the political right-wing are able to produce a neo-nationalist address from a combination of market-hype and chauvinist nostalgia. Suitably narrativized in the recent spate of cinema and television, this leads to cultural *excess* where the question of identity, so valorized in the process, has no stable referents and produces simulacra.

Since the 1970s, Bombay/Hindi cinema has offered a special take on the politics of the subaltern. Flamboyantly played by the biggest star of Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan, radical politics is converted into the sheer stance of the anti-hero shown to act out society's ills through the most melodramatic narrative denouement yet seen on the screen. In *Deewar* (1975), for example, Bachchan accomplishes some manner of psychological nemesis and political revenge colliding with (finally colluding with) family, State and nation. By the 1990s these shored-up illusions of justice start to produce a visual culture based on *hyper*-realism — realism itself over the top, repositioning and

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mutating its frame. Bachchan is in this sense the direct ancestor to the 'naturalist' films of the Marathi/Hindi star Nana Patekar (*Ankush*, 1985; *Prahaar*, 1991; *Krantiveer*, 1994) acting out a right-wing charade of subaltern rage that is frankly perverse. The visual culture produced and nurtured in what is now irreversibly Mumbai frequently endorses the Shiv Sena's political claims to the Maharashtrian 'son of the soil' identity/subalternity.

Another category of the Bombay film has emerged in the 1990s: the new 'Bollywood' scenario, playing to the nostalgia industry generated by the increasingly visible Non-Resident Indian (NRI) market.[18] This has subsumed the great Hindi cinema itself and placed it at the service of a globalized culture industry that today includes cable-TV and the internet and which flaunts a blatantly reactionary cultural nationalism on the world stage. As the Bollywood blockbusters, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun?* (1994), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) and *Kaho Na Pyar Hai* (2000), characterized in the industry as 'feel good plus techno' explode on the scene, the (hyper) realist film takes another turn: Mani Rathnam's *Bombay* (1995) and Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998) promote a new kind of 'belonging' with a citizen-subject adjusted to the changing politics of the nation.

Khalid Mohamed, one of the city's leading film critics, directs *Fiza* (2000), where he straddles the cruel alternatives of local belonging. Hrithik Roshan, the ultimate symbol of late 1990s teen machismo, acts out his own death within the thematic setting of the 1992-93 riots. The hero performs a double patricide of the Muslim and the Hindu politicians before he himself dies in the arms of his sister, played by the star Karisma Kapoor.

M.F. Husain, the 85-year-old artist-laureate of the Indian State has programmed himself to become the artist-citizen adjusted to the changing politics of the nation, and to the visual culture exhibiting this change. When he migrated to Bombay in the 1940s, Husain painted gigantic 'free-hand' cinema hoardings to earn a living. Soon he became India's most successful modern artist and unlike any other artist enhanced his national status by giving himself the persona of a film star. In 1999 he persuaded Madhuri Dixit, the diva of the 1990s Bombay film industry, to celebrate 'Indian womanhood' in the mode of entertainment melodrama and embarked on a feature film, *Gaja Gamini* (2000). He managed to turn the modernist idyll of the artist and his model into a spectacle — inevitably both frames situate the woman outside the pale of the feminist revolution. *Gaja Gamini* invokes what Husain has himself helped put in place as the national/modern mode of iconic representation within a larger civilizational aesthetic. Husain's 'hand-crafted' feature is a summation of his artistic career: by choosing the stars, writing the dialogue, painting street-length sets, financing and distributing the film, he re-inscribes himself in the narrative of a bare-foot modernist hobo in a postmodern garb.

### Citing Popular Culture: A Retake on Representational Modes

This essay considers how the multivocal 'texts' of popular visual culture come to be cited by contemporary artists, and how the citations become an index to map the cultural crossovers within

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and beyond the metropolis. Bhupen Khakhar who grew up in Bombay but lives and works in Baroda, has developed a painterly genre that can claim to be a key factor in the discourse of high art versus popular culture; of cultural identity in relation to sub-genres in the urban hinterland. Khakhar's sources embellish his innately naïve hand in such a way that when he introduces subaltern figures that are his abject lovers — ageing male working-class men (sometimes transvestites), intimately painted, sexually valorized — he unsettles the very locus of (male) subjectivity. He provides a place for the beloved in the wake of the gay revolution, certainly. But, further, while framing the citizen in a democratic norm, he performs a curious artistic manoeuvre: he succeeds in wresting the powers of representation from the morally replete realist mode and puts in its place a composite urban/popular language of sentimental *and* transgressive exchange special perhaps to India.

Atul Dodiya's paintings present a teasing mockery of the realist-melodramatic genre. He maps over images from art history, popular imagery, and textbook parables treating the sources themselves to an egalitarian rule. And though continuing on occasion with the earlier traditions of representation (for example in his watercolours of Gandhi), he positions his art history 'heroes'/mass culture anti-heroes *vis-à-vis* the masquerading self of the artist. The viewer is invited to make a literal reading of painted images across varied surfaces — canvas, paper, laminates, metal. In the recent double triptych titled *Missing* (2000) he paints autobiographical images on the retractable surface of metal rolling shutters in the manner of street signage; and paints nostalgic image-quotations taken from Bombay's popular culture in a sophisticated montage on the laminates behind. By thus equalizing the signs he offers evidence of how metropolitan art becomes by conscious intent part of that signifying chain we call the visual culture of a city (*Pl.* 3).

The younger generations of Indian painters stretch the choice of identity, ideology, and ethics to the point of near neurosis. Jitish Kallat, adopting the style of an inflated mass-media image, elicits his own 'portrait' in the manner of a virtual wall-hoarding and produces a simulacrum. Pictorial self-aggrandisement is used as a strategy to go beyond the postmodern cliché of appropriation; the artist presents himself as a mascot and offers a mock-moral pedagogy about the existential anti-hero in postcolonial society. From such double-edged vanity Girish Dahiwale took a devolutionary step into (fatal) narcissism: just before he committed suicide in 1998 at the age of twenty-five, he displayed his handsome body in a painting that said in a tone of abject self-representation: *Yes, you impregnated me!*

## Artists in the Public Sphere

If on the one hand we read visual culture in terms of the popular, on the other we emphasize its place in relation to the discourse of the *public sphere* and position art practice as a witnessing act. In India, in the decade of the 1990s, such political initiatives converge around the increasingly vexed theme of secularism.

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Ever since the communal riots, several courageous initiatives have been sustained by artists, political activists and independent journalists in Bombay. The forum *Communalism Combat* conducts poster campaigns and brings out a newspaper of the same name. Intervening in the now highly regulated public space of the city, the video has transformed the very sphere of the political documentary in the 1990s. Already a decade earlier the Bombay film-maker Anand Patwardhan had revolutionized documentary cinema (until then dominated by the state-owned Films Division) with his own practice of guerrilla films. The radical vocabulary of Patwardhan's *Hamara Shaher* (1985), followed by *Ram ke Naam* (1993) and *Father Son and Holy War* (1995) served, in the context of the Bombay riots of 1992-93, an express agenda. Activists working with slum dwellers, legal rights groups and women's groups took to the streets and relentlessly recorded the violence perpetrated in their neighbourhoods to produce testimonies like Madhushree Dutta's *I Live in Behrampada* (1993).

If the call to arms in the socialist mode pitches the artist almost without mediation into the spheres of civil/political society, the 1990s emphasis on public spectacle, refurbished by the market but regimented more than ever before by right-wing commands, has encouraged artists into a critique of the earlier representational modes of protest. Socialist postering on the one hand, and the Shiv Sena's fascistic sloganeering on the other, has forced artists to become more reflexive. The very modalities of the relationship between visual culture and democratic politics is at stake and requires a reconsidered formal response.

Here we present the work of four artists, painters through most of their careers, who have turned to making installations realizing that it has become difficult to thematise politics with the full play of painted images. We will see how these artists make use of documentary photography and video footage in installation art — seeking its relationship to a sculptural support, deferring its semiotic function in a relay of objects.

In his conceptually structured installations, Vivan Sundaram proposes that it is precisely the political that remains unrepresented in the widely used representational conventions of art. His sculptural installation, *Memorial* (1993), based on the newspaper photograph taken in the midst of the communal riots by the Bombay photographer, Hoshi Jal, positions the dead man on the street as an icon of political shame. In an elegiac act the artist gives the man a mantle of nails, places the iron coffin on a gun carriage, and buries him on behalf of the State. The act tries to retrieve a political ethic through an acknowledgement of public death. Like Sundaram, Rummana Hussain's installations use the photograph, among other objects, to fix, gloss and defer meaning. In *Home/Nation* (1996), *The Tomb of Begum Hazrat Mahal* (1997), and *Is it What You Think?* (1998) she figured, through her own body, an 'ethnic' representation of a 'muslim woman' and turned it into an allegory of social pain. The chronicle, based on self-inscription, became paradoxical because the installations were conceived as the *mise-en-scène* for an imminent death. Before she died, Rummana Hussain issued a testimony in the name of her own mortality in the installation, *Space for Healing* (1999), which is at the same time a tomb, a shrine and a hospital room. It allows an apotheosis, whereby it offers to put to rest the

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urban nightmare — a nightmare in exact inverse of the dreamers' Bombay — that the city so determinedly keeps awake.

Navjot Altaf, privileging social evidence as moral choice, deconstructs the message in installations like *Links Destroyed and Rediscovered* (1994), *Between Memory and History* (2000). She constructs and punctures real and metaphorical walls by inserting documentary images, confessional recordings, texts that offer informal and participatory states of reparation within the art practice itself. Sundaram, Rummana Hussain and Navjot Altaf suggest that what is possible today is a material re-coding of the concept of struggle. They reintroduce the trope of utopia within and beyond the visual encounter so as to transform the viewer through a shared stake in citizenship (*Pl.* 4).

New media give Nalini Malani a place to position the 'victim' in relation to power. Her video installation, *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998) is based on a famous Partition story by Saadat Hasan Manto, and brought head on into the present by the nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan. Recently, Malani translates Heiner Mueller's *Hamletmachine* into a video installation and sets up a theatric space where a Japanese *butoh* dancer is imaged — and receives images on his body — in a stoic performance. In both installations, the technology (and ideology) of video animation is used to invoke and confront the ghosts of political criminals (*Pl.* 5). As sounds and images from the fascist moment in Europe and Japan overlap, the threat of suppressed fascism in India surfaces. Malani's political interpretation, with its mandate on reformism, unravels a guilt-ridden gestalt; Hamlet's dilemma catapults into publicly exorcized moral shame at several historical moments. Allowing her artist-subjectivity to be spreadeagled over dangerous terrain, Malani radicalizes forms of the 'personal' using well-honed techniques of feminist psychoanalysis wherein the lesson of resistance is continually re-learnt.

**Photography, Masquerade**

In focusing on the *public* nature of cultural self-assertion, we have repeatedly foregrounded a relationship between artistic identity and historical responsibility to the deprived subject. Indeed, the question, who is the *real* subject of representation, haunts the imagination of the third world artist; to it is appended the discourse and practice of a critical anthropology where photography plays an important part. It negotiates questions of authenticity and artifice; it offers different readings to the paradox of presence and absence; it problematizes location. Putting to rout the flimsier kinds of representational claims, it realises the desire for masquerade.

The work of two women photographers, Sooni Taraporevala and Ketaki Sheth, relates to social communities in an urban anthropological mode. Taraporevala's subjects are the Parsis who are an ancient diaspora, religious exiles from Persia across the Arabian Sea to the western coast of India. They are among the most real subjects of Bombay — by the nineteenth century they were active agents of modernization and among the leading entrepreneurs in the metropolis. Today, in the era of chauvinist nationalism, they appear like a receding sign. Sheth's subjects are the native and

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immigrant Gujarati Patels, forming an upwardly mobile middle-class spreading out from the western coast of India to Africa, the United Kingdom and the USA. Sheth chooses to photograph the strangely frequent phenomena of the Patel *twins* in different classes and locations. She finds herself losing/gaining the photographer's discreet subject: the twins appear ghost-like in their inadvertent doubling, in their masquerade produced by biological splitting. The pictures work in a paradoxical manner as the Patel protagonists with absent looks nevertheless endorse themselves with the double stamp of struggle and success and 'win' the battle for a future.

If these works deal with real subjects and their hidden masquerades, Dayanita Singh plunges herself into the (il)licit space of entertainment and pleasure, pain and embarrassment, and comes up with an openly performative mode. Her photographs frame the transactions of the urban body — the ungainly queen of Bombay films' song and dance routines, Saroj Khan, or the city's sex workers. The photographer presents her characters dissembling their way into a respectable world even as colonial Bombay, in her recent photographs of the city's landmark museum and theatres, turns into simulacra. These manoeuvres between the real and the make-believe come upfront with the sculptor Pushpamala N., now working with performance and new media. She directs herself as an actress playing a double role to Meenal Agarwals' 'cinematography' and comes up with a series of black and white photographs set in Bombay titled *Phantom Lady* or *Kismet* (1996-98). These are not 'film stills' but a synoptic *film noir* narrative where Pushpamala emphasizes the performative as an occasion for transgression. She inverts the conservative regulations that determine public morality by her masquerade of the female artist as a classic/cliché of the good/bad girl (*Pl.* 6).

Photography's investment in tracking the real subject has inducted itself into larger representational issues, and the documentary mode has always played an honourable role in bringing to view previously unrepresented realities. The struggle in realism to define the self through defining what is around one is appropriated by a photographer like Swapan Parekh who takes the documentary image into what many would ironically see as its logical culmination: *advertising*. The context, so assiduously elaborated in documentary images, so consistently upturned in avant-garde photography, is returned to you as your neighbourhood market/shopping mall; the image advertising the branded products provides a facile interface between consumption and belonging.

**New Media, Young Artists**

This brings us to new media and a conspicuous slippage of *meaning* in the life of the image. Certainly in advertising, in the extension of the image into video (and thus into special effects), or further into purely virtual spaces such as the CD-ROM or the Internet, the public address of the documentary photograph (to which the artist may still determinedly return) is inverted by programmed manipulation that transfers the image into spectral forms of communication.

New media promotes a cosmopolitanism that is precisely *about* virtual identities: along with 'Hinglish', Indipop, Bhangra rap and the deliberately low-brow remix of Hindi film tunes and other

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such cultural makeovers of formerly vernacular idioms, the globalized artist can now revisit and reframe conventions of representation to put up a new charade of meanings. Sudarshan Shetty, working with painting, photos, found objects and fibreglass sculptures, mirrors himself in the kitsch and glitzy commodities as a virtuoso male-artist in love with himself and the artwork he deploys to garnish his narcissism. He also makes cherished symbols of Indian culture stand in as a farce: the red fibreglass cow with human babies clinging to it is called *Home* (1998) (*Pl. 7*). In contrast, Kausik Mukhopadhyay, with an ironical self-evacuation, embraces an artisanal ethics by privileging use-value in urban waste. He names modernist readymades as ideological allies to mimic and spoof the increasing commodification of art. Both aspects are matched by younger women who substitute male with female narcissism in the same idiom of indifference. Sharmila Samant concocts objects with an artisanal flair using the city's detritus and records her obsessive hunt for the global found object in mock-documentary videos (such as *Global Clones*, 1999). Shilpa Gupta works with new technology — video, computer and the Internet and like a new kid in the block makes her earnest neighbours in Indian art uneasy with virtual communication. All these artists have a clever take on consumer society but on the basis of the very consumption of the artwork that they mockingly package and proffer.

Part funky, part pragmatic, the young Bombay artists are levelling the field for high and low art. Swimming in the wake of a vanguard, wearing the aura of the global *flâneur*, these artists can today function in and out of the galleries, the biennials, the institutions, the market. They negotiate literalism and masquerade, they co-relate the self, the spectacle, the empty sign. Is there a new turn in the very premises upon which art has been made in and for and about the city? Recent initiatives suggest that these artists are beginning to look for a definition of collectivity that can pitch them into acts of cultural intervention. It is possible also that they are beginning to recognize and critique a situation that all too easily slips — the more easily after violence of the early 1990s in Bombay — into the field of the 'post-political'.

This brings the argument in this essay full circle. If the equation between art practice and the representational modes that cite/site the popular; and between art practice and the discourse of the public sphere, is to gain further significance, artists have to grasp the democratic impulse at work in the city's visual culture. The current postmodern celebration of visual culture — often a simple fusion of high art, popular culture, new media — needs a minimum political intent to bring contemporary cultural creativity into a new equation with the historical avant-garde.

**References**

1. While the transition of the city name from Bombay to Mumbai is signalled in the very title, we make an authorial choice to use the name Bombay in the course of the essay. Placed in the heterodox history of this city, this choice can maintain a self-explanatory polemic: about questions of belonging and appropriation and about the larger politics of location. The name Mumbai is used in the post-1995 period in the captions and endnotes.

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2. Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*, Dia Art Foundations/ Bay Press, Seattle, 1986, p. 3.
3. Walter Benjamin, 'Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris', in *Paris: The Capital of the Nineteenth Century (expose of 1935), in The Arcades Project*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999, pp. 3-13.
4. F. N. Souza, 'Nirvana of a Maggot', *Words and Lines*, Villiers Publications, London, 1959, p. 15.
5. The liberation movement against caste oppression and untouchabilty has a long history in India. The twentieth-century Dalit movement in Maharashtra spearheaded between the 1930s and 1950s by the radical jurist, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (contemporary/contestant of Gandhi and Nehru; the main architect of the Constitution of India), involves a rejection of Hinduism/affirmative conversion to Buddhism. It incorporates militant outfits like the Dalit Panthers. The Dalit consciousness finds its metropolitan expression in Marathi literature, especially poetry. See Arjun Dangle (ed.), *Poisoned Bread, Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1992.
6. Namdeo Dhasal, 'Tyanchi Sanatana Daya' ('Their Eternal Pity'), *Golpitha;* translated from the Marathi by Eleanor Zelliot and Jayant Karve. Quoted in Vidyut Bhagwat, 'Bombay in Dalit Literature', in Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (eds.), *Bombay: Mosaic of Modern Culture*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996. p. 122.
7. Baburao Bagul, 'Maran Swasta Hot Aahe' ('Death is getting Cheaper'), translated from the Marathi by Eleanor Zelliot and Jayaant Karve. Quoted in Vidyut Bhagwat, *ibid.*, p. 121.
8. Justice B.N. Srikrishna of the Bombay High Court was appointed by the state government to inquire into the 1992-93 riots. See *Damning Verdict: Srikrishna Commission Report: Mumbai Riots 1992-93*, Sabrang Communications and Publishing, Mumbai, n.d.
9. Contextualized by the 1956 regional Samyukta Maharashtra movement and the protectionist 'jobs for Maharashtrians' platform, the Shiv Sena, since its formation in 1966, has organized itself to oppose the non-Maharashtrian migrant groups and communities from different regions of India, residing and taking employment in Bombay. At the same time, the outfit is geared to contest the Left labour movement. The tragic failure of the textile strike of 1982-83 gave the Shiv Sena a firm foothold in the labour movement; it came to power in alliance with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and ruled Bombay/ Maharashtra during 1994-99. Its total membership strength is estimated at 40,000 (and more) members; its vituperative leader, Bal Thackeray, who openly declares a fascist ideology in relation to the Indian minorities, especially the Muslims, was indicted in the 1992-93 carnage in Bombay. There are numerous studies on the Shiv Sena and on its role in the Bombay riots. See Sujata Patel, 'Bombay's Urban predicament'; Jayant Lele, 'Saffronization of the Shiv Sena: The Political Economy of City, State and Nation'; Gerard Heuze, 'Cultural Populism: The Appeal of the Shiv Sena'; Kalpana Sharma, 'Chronicle of a Riot Foretold', in Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (eds.), *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.
10. The (last) 1991 census shows 9.9 million for Greater Bombay and, more relevant, 12.5 million for the Bombay Metropolitan Region covering a 600 sq km area. Projected figures for the Bombay Metropolitan Region: 27.5 million in 2005.
11. The story of the rise of a labour movement in relation to the textile industry of Bombay has been very extensively chronicled by Indian scholars and political activists. For the famous 1982-83 textile strike, see: Javed Anand, 'The Tenth Month — A chronology of events' in The *10th Month-Bombay's Historic Textile Strike*, Centre for Education & Documentation, Bombay, 1983; Rajni Bakshi, *The Long Haul*, BUILD Documentation Centre, Bombay, 1987; H.Van Wersch, *Bombay Textile Strike 1982-83*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992. For the peculiar phenomenon of Datta Samant, the maverick trade union leader who led — and lost — the strike and was murdered a decade later, see Sandip Pendse

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'Labor: the Datta Samant phenomenon', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.16, nos. 17& 18, 1981. See the *Economic and Political Weekly*, during the period 1980-85, for intensive analyzes of the Bombay textile strike in relation to the larger issues of Indian labour politics.

12. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1988.
13. For a seminal study of the city of Bombay, from its colonial beginnings to the 1990s, see Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra, *Bombay: The Cities Within*, India Book House, Bombay, 1995.
14. In 1965, Charles Correa (with Pravina Mehta and Shirish B. Patel), made a seminal proposal to ease the pressure on the island city of Bombay. It entailed developing a twin city, New Bombay, on the northern mainland, where the Maharashtra state government would be relocated. See Correa, Mehta and Patel, 'Planning for Bombay: 1. Patterns of Growth; 2. The Twin City; 3. Current Proposals', in *Marg*, Bombay, vol. xviii, no. 3, June 1965. It is a measure of Correa's authority and power of intervention that the proposal was accepted at the state level and though the state headquarters did not shift, the twin city came into existence. The development strategy for New Bombay (1971-91) has been fraught with problems and opinions are severely polarized over the enterprise.
15. Charles Correa, 'Great City: Terrible Place', in Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist (eds.), *Cities on the Move*, Verlag Gerd Hatje, Germany, 1997, chapter 9, unpag.
16. Contestations regarding the city have produced a large amount of literature from sociologists and urbanists. See the essays by Nigel Harris, 'Bombay in the Global Economy'; Swapna Banerjee-Guha, 'Urban Development Process in Bombay: Planning for Whom?'; Pratima Panwalkar, 'Upgradation of Slums: A World Bank Programme'; P.K. Das, 'Manifesto of a Housing Activist', in Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (eds.), *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996. Important interventions in the city include the work of P.K. Das and Shabana Azmi (Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti); A. Jockin (National Slum Dwellers Federation); Sheela Patel (Society for the Promotion of Area Resources SPARC) and Rahul Mehrotra (The Urban Design and Research Institute, UDRI).
17. Mehrotra used the term in conversation with the authors.
18. The production of Hindi films mostly made in Bombay ranged between 150-200 per year during the 1990s; this constitutes about one fifth of the total number of films produced in India. For referencing Bombay/Indian films see Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, British Film Institute and Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

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# 2

# Contemporary Art, Issues of Praxis and Art-Collaboration: Interventions in Bastar

*Navjot Altaf*

In this paper, I attempt to interrogate as to how I came to think of co-operative/collaborative art practice and how my present on-going collaboration with Adivasi artists from Bastar began. In order to do this; it becomes essential to analyze what engendered the shift in my art practice in the early 1990s. Whether I made a shift because of my engagement with the co-operative mode as well as the interest in interactive aspect of installation art that perhaps had gradually evolved from my involvement with making art from a perspective that I had developed due to my exposure to Marxist social theory and philosophy which made me conscious of the way political analysis can offer important insights into art practice and reach out grass-root levels through interaction and alternative modes of practice, a quest that had perhaps, begun for me in the early 1970s.

Moreover, writings such as *The Second Sex* and *The Woman Destroyed* by Simone De Beauvoir around that time made me sensitive to questions raised by women's writings. (Questions not specifically being dealt with by the progressive left at that time.) Further, access to writings of women through the mid and late 1980s on women's interventions in art historical discourses[1] exposed me to the issues related to the conditions under which women had been working as artists since centuries and questions concerning the conventional notions of artistic practices and assumptions about women's art making processes, made me conscious about the fact that the "dialectic between analysis and action is valuable but only if it is conceptualized by the embrace of a larger collective social change".[2]

During that period majority of progressive political movements including those involving women's groups in Bombay/Mumbai employed art and artists for propaganda purposes. Hence artists interested in the politics of culture, in the absence of any artist's collective addressing the issues concerning artistic production as well as other social issues including gender in the context of art, practised art and activism at two separate levels. In the case of women practising art till late 1970s, preferred not to identify themselves as *women* artists and they even hesitated to acknowledge the impact of their gender on their art making strategies. On the other hand, post-1970s, argument established by women artists movement in the west helped one understand "that there was/is a co-

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relation between the value system that sustains institutions of art and the sexual division that structures our societies"[3] had its impact on the thinking of some of women artists including myself. But the political struggle of the artists continued to be ignored by critics and society alike, and more so when visual art addressed social questions or engaged with political struggle. It was not considered art, it was politics, they said.

The Kerala-Baroda based "Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association" in the mid-1980s did raise issues concerning alternative art practices/diverse practices. Nevertheless, the point of contact and tensions between the mainstream and the marginalized peoples art were not being dealt with in the context of art in a sustained manner. Though some artists like Meera Mukherji, K.G. Subramanyan and some others had been engaged with crafts persons to learn the techniques of their craft and to involve them to carry out their own art production, the assumed distinction between artist and crafts-person in the art historical context was not foregrounded. The 1980s saw the establishment of a significant museum such as Bharat Bhavan that placed Adivasi art from central India adjacent to contemporary urban art, where Adivasis are represented as contemporary beings and their art practices as parallel but their expressions are read as universal, timeless and mystical[4] by overlooking their social and cultural meanings or the politico-social conditions of cultural production, and local reception.

At the same time, the boom in the art market in the 1980s largely distracted the producers and the consumers of art alike from any real issues dealing with changing discourses in cultural studies. In the absence of serious art magazines or journals published in India with the possible exception of *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, published from Delhi[5] the emphasis was on the commercial aspect of art in the popular media accessed by the masses, which resulted in artists gaining more prominence over the issues of politics of art practice.

**My Art Practice Since Mid-1970s: The Shifts**

Right from the time I began practicing art, my interest and commitment to the complex multi-faceted social and political struggle of the marginalized sections in Bombay led me to make issue based or content oriented art. Which I tried taking to alternative public places to make it available to wider audiences.[6] However, such attempts were successful only during events organized by political activists in the 1970s and women's groups in the 1980s. It never took off as a move to move outside galleries, except that I, like other like-minded artists, had made a conscious choice to exhibit in public galleries with the intention of interacting with audiences other than artists and collectors.

Locating oneself in private galleries in the 1980s was not a strategic move. It began to happen with the boom in the art market. The intentions of the art I made did not change but simultaneous showings in both private and public galleries helped earn through art. Number of artists known for their radical political position in the 1970s and 1980s also entered the mainstream art scene. Financial success of the artists became the subsequent focus of the galleries and the media. But at the same

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time in the late 1980s and early 1990s quite a few politically conscious artists preferred exploring diverse practices including installation, video, and performance art without much support and had to look for alternative resources to carry out.

The international Feminist movement and the liberation struggle of sexual minorities enabled women and gay artists in India too, to give open expression to their sexuality and ideas. In my own case, further information or access in the 1990s to writings such as, *Women Writing in India* (K. Lalitha and Susie Tharu); *Subaltern Studies* (R. Guha/G.C. Spivak); *Subversive Sites* (Kapur/Cossman); *Politics of the Possible* (Kumkum Sangari); *Women and Culture* (Kumkum Sangari/Suresh Vaid); *Representations of the Intellectual* (Edward W. Said) and art discourses from India (*Journal of Arts and Ideas*) and of the west like *Towards a Culture of Difference and Thinking the Difference* (Luce Irigaray); *Framing Feminism, Old Mistresses* (Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock); *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* and *Women Art and Society* (Whitney Chadwick), etc., gave me an insight into women's ongoing struggle and strategies of art practices which challenged mainstream modernism. The art making processes by them were not seen as style or movement but a value system, a way of life, revolutionary strategies and the understanding that gender is socially and not naturally constructed. (in a patriarchal system) This helped me understand the questions posed concerning the politics of gender, difference and neutralization of the sexes through writings and the art made by women in the west and in our context.

**Art Making in Co-operation with Creative Persons from Different Disciplines : (1991)**

Invitation (to painters) from Prism Multimedia for a project *State of the Art* (1991) opened up possibilities of making computer based art which could be accessed by any number of people from anywhere in the world as well as laser prints editions to make them available at low price. In the end the images created on digital machines with the co-operation of computer graphic designers were transferred on to large canvases in special studios in U.K. The process was viewed as collective experimentation between painters and graphic designers but individually signed works by the artists alone were to determine the value of the canvases contrary to the original concept.

The issue regarding the cooperative nature of the project was not raised in the context of art practice either by the artists or the graphic designers involved in the venture. Since I had little or no frame of reference at that stage to open a dialogue concerning this mode of making art in the context of Indian contemporary art practices it remained at a level of a personal query.

**Who Made Reputation from the Project *Circling The Square*? (1993)**

The next productive experiment that I was involved with was the making of utilitarian sculptural objects in a process that drew in carpenters, a weaver a tailor and an electrician in my case. The process entailed principles of collective work; but the mode as a mutual choice for all engaged in making the works was never taken up as an issue even amongst the 8 participating artists and the

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writer of the catalogue essay. I had accepted the invitation to participate to question the hierarchies that exist between "High and Low Art" which implied a distinction between "Artist and Craftsperson." The process however only reasserted the hierarchy; of the artist, design and concept of the works against all others involved. The co-operative efforts to complete it successfully were partially recognized as the collective outcome was credited to "us" artists alone. And this was contrary to the original idea of bringing people from different disciplines to create for wider audiences. The project was (installed) presented at a public gallery but not necessarily for alternative non-specialist audiences. These experiments gradually made a shift in my way of looking at "collective art" in a new critical context. Also, I began questioning to understand the difference between co-operative and collaborative modes.

Rise of right wing fundamentalism in Bombay had been gradually effecting the cultural climate of the city but post Babri Masjid demolition riots in 1992-93 raised specific questions concerning the need to recognize cultural difference in a so-called cosmopolitan/multicultural city of Mumbai. At this point, strong need to collaborate with creative persons working in different disciplines but with similar creative and political commitments led me to realize an Installation *Links Destroyed and Re-discovered* (1994). Installation incorporated two documentary films by two women filmmakers and specially composed and sung *bandiśes* by another woman classical vocalist.[7] This "mutually" consented collaborative endeavour exposed me to the levels of relationships in interactive aspect of collaborative mode and Installation Art making process. A reciprocal as well as dialectical relationship between the collaborators made it clear that no individual needs to abandon independent thinking, which actually is a source to draw from. Interactive aspect of Installation also facilitates relationship between the "viewer and the work, the work and the space and space and the viewer. Though nature of the participation varies from work to work by the same artist." For instance artist may offer the viewer a particular activity or the viewer may just confront what is there . . . "essence of Installation art is a spectator's participation."[8] I realized from this experience that analysis of Installation Art is possible better by having the experience of being in it since viewer's participation is an important aspect.

To my disappointment neither Installation nor collaboration became the focus of any review/discussion either by the artists or critics, except their interest in the materials used.

*Images Re-drawn* (1995-96) was imagined as a co-operative project, which involved a Mumbai based art school trained sculptor mainly engaged with commercial mass production but extremely interested in working with an artist engaged with the issue of representation of female body in the context of art. From 1990s onwards, my water-colour series titled *Images of Women* had been dealing with the subject. The idea of inviting a male artist involved in creating stereotypical imagery of decorative female bodies as curios, to participate in a process dealing with a subject — how to differentiate a female body from sexist usage or religious, and how the bodies could be reclaimed from its patriarchal construction, was to encourage a dialogue between us to realize how it is only through critical understanding of representation that representation of women can occur.

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Like some women artists chose to look back in time in search of different historical context for their efforts, I had got fascinated with primitive cultures to study representation of women, not for revivalist purposes but to shift, move and replace the archetypal in contemporary context. For me it was the critical use of myth rather than its celebration that I was concerned with. For this body of work I took references from Mayan, African and Indian pre-historic and primitive cultures as well as popular images and text from Indian women's writings, magazines and newspapers.

Making of the works with a male sculptor was full of disagreements when it came to re-presentation of the body, since he was working within the framework of my imagery the scope for an in-depth dialogue on the subject was limited and the suggestions made were stereotypically contradictory. In the end he wanted to be credited only as a technical guide. On the other hand, the consent from the editors of *Women Writing in India*, text from both the volumes was incorporated in the installation and so was other textual material researched and collected by me from women's centres and centres for Education and Documentation in Mumbai.

However, the project in this case did pose questions regarding the problematic and possibilities of co-operative/collaborative mode of art practice and the difference between the two.

Access to the critically viewed co-operative/collaborative projects like *The Dinner Party* (1979) and *The Birth Project* (1980-85) by Judy Chicago with hundreds of needle workers and ceramic artists from various places/countries had further engendered my interest in a debate on the issue of collaboration and art made by women traditionally and how the decision of the artist to use many different techniques and styles of needlework as well as China painting in her work to call attention to women's unrecognized heritage or significance of traditional women's crafts was later re-read by various feminist art historians like Tamar Garb as problematic. In their earlier writings, Griselda Pollock and R. Parker too in a critical response to an essay by American feminist art historian Patricia Mainardi had dismissed the inclusion of crafts traditionally executed by women in the modernists systems of value. They had argued that "Instead of glorifying crafts such as needlework, women should recognize them as a locus of ideological struggle, and they made a case for an investigation of their cultural and social meaning."[9]

**Myself, Bastar, Silpi Gram and the Adivasi Artists : (1997-2002)**

My contact with Bastar is as old as my acquaintance with an Adivasi bell metal sculptor Jaidev Baghel from Kondagaon. Since 1973, interaction with him and other artists from that region during their frequent exhibitions in Mumbai and my visits to their area had to an extent enabled me to understand the existing/living tradition of sculpture making. It meant understanding the local means, their inevitable interaction with migrated population and its social and cultural impact, urban culture, art market and their attempts to relocate themselves as contemporary artists in metropolitan galleries and museums. What had interested me most to visit Kondagaon initially was a visionary institute. The Silpi Gram was conceived and built by Jaidev and his associates in the 1980s with the belief that

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such a place could play an important role to create an interactive spirit amongst artists from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds from the region, or any other part of India and the world.

Since the institute offered the workshop environment, Adivasi artists like Rajkumar, Santibai, Raituram and a few others whom I met there, and who worked in the studios since it was built, wished to take time off from their stereotypical mass production for the home and urban market. Their practice denied them scope for experimentation inspired by their contemporary situation or inherited vision. Santibai also wanted to work independently as she had been an assistant to her husband Raitu for 15 years, a common practice with most women in that area. After *Images Re-Drawn*, I was keen to further my understanding concerning the representation of woman's body in the art of this region. Though my interest was not to look at Adivasi art merely for formal significance, unconcerned about the cultural/historical context in which art is produced. My intention was to engage with the visual field from a premise that is informed by a progressive political perspective as one looks at any other contemporary art practice.

Another important concern was to re-read the earlier interventionist's readings of Adivasi art of this region (to understand Adivasi and rural art practices in a larger social and art historical context I read writers like Jyotindra Jain, Subramanian and J. Swaminathan quite extensively). Making Silpi Gram our base was of mutual interest and a grant award from the India Foundation for the Arts under Arts Collaboration Programme in 1997 made it possible to come together to work side by side. We were not looking at coherence, but difference. The emphasis was on parallel practices, diverse processes, experimentation and travelling within Bastar to see/experience Adivasi arts and architecture created for utility, ritualistic and commercial purposes as well as other art forms patronized by non-Adivasi ruling classes over the centuries.

Travel and living in the interiors of Bastar with my colleagues exposed me to the social, economic, political and cultural environment of the area and the identity crises that Adivasis are going through — which is multiple and interrelated. Since the area in and around Kondagaon where we are located is no longer isolated and cut off from outside influences, Adivasis deal and combat politics of culture and religion propagated by different non-Adivasi religious and political groups. Changes, beneficial or not necessarily beneficial, under development schemes by the state and the central government most of the times occur without their knowledge or consent, hence their representation in the mainstream decision-making processes remains marginal.

The project *Modes of Parallel Practice; Ways of Art Making* represents an interactive phase. Time spent together in an informal workshop space while making independent works, travel and simultaneous discussions on the issues concerning the language produced through different modes of art practices, in contemporary Adivasi and urban art, Re-defining the terminology of art/craft and artist/crafts-person in the context of Art history, questioning the misconception that Adivasi art is created by groups rather than by individuals, and the difference between the prevailing guild system in some of the studios there, and collaboration as a strategy in contemporary Indian art

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helped us understand one another and the nature of our workshop activities as well as our premises and positions as artists. Though gradual, the process encouraged communication among us at various levels.

Since during travel we had visited two local high schools and *balwadi*s to learn about the education system, half way through the first phase, we were requested by two teachers interested in poetry and arts in general to undertake short art projects with the students as the schools have no significant art activity in the curriculum. Hence the possibility of working with the young outside school hours was considered mutually but reluctantly to begin with particularly because my colleagues had neither learnt art in schools nor had they ever experienced conducting art workshops. But gradually they felt that exploring the ways of sharing what they know with the young could be an interesting process. For me, despite having been working with the young from the beginning of my career as an artist in Bombay, attempts to work with students from that culturally different area was a curious change. In the course of discussing the possible subject, nature and ways of carrying out the project, students were invited to make suggestions. Bastar region and Madhya Pradesh in 1997, was in the grip of drought. They felt the urgency to understand the reasons leading to such environmental conditions and its effects. How to pose questions through art became the central concern of the students. Their engagement with this question resulted in *Chawal Ki Kahani*. Material used for making this art work generated a discussion around research oriented art making processes, using unconventional materials and how to place art like embroidery, *kantha*, etc., in the context of art practice. The outcome of this project was an installation and performance by the students at Silpi Gram, viewed by large number of people, students and teachers from schools in Kondagaon. *Chawal Ki Kahani* had stimulated everyone to think of the possibilities of having more such workshops with students of less privileged schools in that area. Where art is not considered important enough a subject to be introduced or paid attention to and where the teachers do not imagine or explore alternative ways of exposing the young even to the culture they come from or different cultures that students are ignorant about. We realized that for such art activities expensive and conventional materials, which most students in rural area in any case cannot afford, are not necessarily required.

Discussion around our first unintentional collective attempt gradually led us to foreground the issue of collaboration and to pose questions regarding the possibilities and problematic of this mode in this specific context. What became clear from frequent dialogue amongst us was that collaboration is not simply getting together to either make art or to engage in any mutually beneficent activities. Rather, only when it became a matter of choice and strategy for all, when each one is able to question one's own art practice and when the process does not lead one to abandon independent thinking. Hence at an experimental level at the end of the first year we mutually negotiated a strategy between us to explore the ground for collaboration. At this point, independently done works were shown in Mumbai and Fukuoka city and were seen as coming together of contemporary Adivasi and mainstream urban art.

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Even while wanting to continue work within Bastar, my colleagues wanted to do a project with students in a Surve village in Maharashtra to experience life and culture of this area. We had been here earlier to discuss workshop prospects with local schools. While working on the toy poles designed by my colleagues, *Between the Subject and the Object* to be installed at an existing *bālwāḍī* section of a primary school, the idea of reversing the process by doing site/place oriented works in Bastar villages began to evolve. We had begun imagining the possibilities of exploring the concept. The concept emerged with the realization that the children there had no space of their own where they could go to play or engage themselves in other activities outside school hours. Discussions amongst us revolved around the questions of how the shift from movable to non-movable art would further lead to possibilities for a change and in what sense were we imagining a break away from our present context of work situation?

Student's participation/response and villager's contribution[10] at Surve mattered a great deal for us to view the function of such art, people's participation and our own attitude and approach to collaborative mode. The process was not free of tensions caused by time-to-time disagreements between the artists. Yet, to continue experimentation with the concept of *Pilla Gudis* (temples for children) (*Pl.* 8) in Bastar was a mutual desire. Soon after Surve, travel with the art historian Shivaji K. Panikkar to art historical sites of Ajanta, Ellora, Sanchi, and museums in the cities, Bhopal, Vidisha, Delhi, Jagdalpur and to places like Matnar, Shoshan Pal, Badri Mau and various sites of *Maria Khambas* within Bastar opened up a discussion around a concept of architectural structures as a symbol of body in Indian art and the question of how it could be taken up to further imagine the structures of *Pilla Gudis* since each one of us were dealing with the body in our earlier independent works.

However, before getting down to designing *Pilla Gudi* structures we, together travelled to various nearby villages to know the locations of schools, *balwadi*s, and other meeting places for the young and the old, like the temples. By meeting with the people in different villages we wanted to know their response to the idea of an artwork not created for ritualistic, religious or commercial purposes but which could engage the young and the old in the politics of knowledge. Interaction to an extent helped us understand the psyche of the habitants and the locations for the structures allotted by them.

*Pilla Gudis* are imagined to be meeting spaces for the young, for them to interact with one another, with those possessing an oral tradition of knowledge including artists from different disciplines, from their own and neighbouring villages as well as visiting/invited artists from any part of India and the world (lots of creative persons from all over the world generally categorized as tourists visit Bastar but are never invited to share their experiences). Such interactions can possibly encourage the young to think about different ways of knowing and modes of working, enabling them to draw nourishment and sustenance from difference and similarities. The fact that the mainstream education system in general neutralizes cultural difference in the hope of creating a sense of "Unity in Diversity" which affects student's perception of culture. There is little or no

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reference to Adivasi or Dalit history and culture to which large number of students belong, especially the area we are working in. Hence the idea of art workshops outside school hours can open up possibilities for students, invited teachers, and for us to realize the fact of being ignorant of minority culture and to investigate the manner in which ignorance and invisibility in mainstream teaching/ learning process alienates young and old from their own realities, myths and social struggle.

As of now, we have decided that sculptural structures are to be designed by each of us artists independently and constructed one by one. All share the responsibility of carrying out the work in different villages on each artist's individual concept. Working together also lets us divide the workload. Here, apart from the artists, even community members are involved; this is a complex process and at times causes frictions. But what we try to be constantly conscious of is that under no circumstances a process of give and take overrides the right to judge. Thus the process attempts to have emphasis on humane values, as well as the mode of how the work is carried out is of immense relevance.

We have presently been involved in discussions with the larger community to discuss *Pilla Gudi* as well as the concept of *Nalpar* project (*Pl.* 9 to 12). Apart from collaborating with Rajkumar, Santibai and Gessu for *Pilla Gudi* project, I have been involved with another project involving seven Adivasi women artists in Kondagaon, Bastar. It supports women in their effort to express their concerns through art. Like Santibai they had been helpers to male artists in their own families despite undergoing number of training programmes funded by Govt./NGOs. As far as this project is concerned, I place myself as an artist and as a facilitator for the women to open up and recognize the need to turn to one another to strengthen their beliefs and self-esteem. I envisage the work process as creating information about Adivasi history and the positive aspects of women's position in their own culture and how they situate themselves in contemporary situations with a changing political climate. The attempt has been to make space for diversity and for the voices of marginalized to surface.

Whilst seven artists are attempting to practice art independently in a workshop environment at Silpi Gram, I have been engaged with site oriented works at hand pump sites selected with the help of seven women involved in the project. My concern of designing and transforming the sites is firstly to create drainage to improve hygiene since *Nagar Palika* does not provide this facility, secondly, to create heights for women to place their vessel to avoid weight on the bent leg before placing it on the head. (According to the doctors a peculiar bent leg posture harms the back with time.) Thirdly, transforming the public sites where women, children, and men of all ages come for a mundane job like fetching water as many as 10/15 times a day for domestic or other usage. Along with *Pilla Gudis* plan is to take up as many sites as possible in and around Kondagaon. Seven artists and local inhabitants, at different levels have participated in the process.

Interaction with community's members is helping us to understand the working of social network,

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and issues associated with respect for Adivasi culture and human dignity. Issues at stake also include the urgent need to be informed about social rights to enable them to make decisions, however basic though they may be. It has exposed us, me especially, to many unquestioning beliefs held by the Adivasis, and with which I may not agree in present times. But the larger sections of Adivasi communities draw sustenance and find them relevant. Hence we find that there is an integral relationship between art making and other aspects of life determining artists perspectives there.

"An interventionist needs to develop a vision free of preconditioning and assumptions." Here I am referring to myself. Realizing that our ways of looking at things differ many a times, we have to constantly make efforts to broaden resources to open ourselves to all the possible parallel questions concerning our differences while making decisions during the process, this is not simple as now we are interacting with larger number of community members, but since we are contemplating the problematic and the possibilities of the co-operative/collaborative mode out of choice, the problems lead us to further questioning. "The questions people ask us are as important as the questions asked by us."[11] My colleagues see themselves as interventionists in their own environment. The nature of their intervention, mine and ours together, perhaps can be known from the intentions of our concepts, questioning and ways of carrying out the work at public sites. Process, though time consuming helps in learning about the subtle/complex ways of local culture.

Children in these villages imagine the *Gudis* to be different and more beautiful than their schools, especially as they are being designed and built by artists. We take their suggestions into consideration while conceiving the designs and selecting materials. We have been creating sculptural structures in which they are able to reflect on themselves. Their participation can transform the sites totally or partially, the idea is to encourage young minds to be able to question and take decisions, rather than merely receive. This will also help the artists engaged with the activities to free themselves from taking a stereotypical position of a teacher.

For us, organizing the workshops is as much a project as creating the sites; it is to create a communication network between artists from different cultures and disciplines from within Bastar and outside and with and between the young. The plan is to invite social and cultural volunteers, college students, teachers, workers, peasants, hawkers, etc., as well. They can in many ways share their experiences of belonging to different cultural and economic backgrounds and how or whether they are knowingly dealing with the issue in present times. The Adivasi areas around Kondagaon, now part of a new state — Chattisgarh, are no longer remote.

The process is dealing with questions related to site specificity, co-operative/collaborative art practice as a strategy, and how these "modes" in our specific case has motivated us to shift our concerns from making movable art works to site/place oriented non-movable and non-consumable art which challenges the autonomy of auratic art objects. And, also how these shifts has motivated and enabled my colleagues and me to locate our artistic experiences in art educational context. As

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artists we are interested in employing pedagogic strategies to engender learning, the process of teaching, and learning that avoids neutralization of cultural differences by dismantling traditional orthodoxy, which also suppresses difference in sexes. To prepare grounds to encourage dialogue across difference in our opinion is to engage the young with interactive art activities from initial stages to enable them to speak their minds.

Simultaneously along with these Bastar projects I have been engaged in making other interactive/co-operative works as well.[12]

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1. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988, a book I came across in late 1980s.
2. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard,*The Power of Feminist Art-Affinities:Thoughts on an Incomplete History*, Suzane Lacy, Hary N. Abrams, 1994, p. 273.
3. Rozsika Parker and Griselda pollock, *Framing Feminism-Preface*, Pandora Press, London, 1987, p.xiii.
4. J. Swaminathan, *Perceiving Fingers — a catalogue of the collection*, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, 1987.
5. A quarterly journal published by Tulika Print Communication Services for G.P. Deshpande.
6. Worked in schools in working class areas, mobile crèches at construction sites, conducted literacy and sewing sessions specifically for women at Matunga labour camp, made issue based posters, participated in protest campaigns as part of the political activities organized by students organization 'Proyom' in the 1970s and women's groups in the 1980s that I worked with, helped organizing exhibitions of contemporary art at colleges, schools, university club house, Matunga Labour Camp and Cheetah Camp Bombay (1974-79) curated an exhibitions of contemporary art for the *Convention on Communal Harmony*, Calcutta, 1985, and exclusive women artists works for *Expression* — Women's Cultural Festival, Bombay.
7. *Bombay: A Myth Shattered* by Teetsa Setalwad, *I Live In Behrampada* by Madhushree Dutta shot during the riots and *bandishes* composed in collaboration with students from Wilson College but sung by Neela Bhagwat.
8. Both quotes, Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art-Introduction*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, p. 13.
9. Amelia Jones, *Sexual Politics Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist art History*, UCLA/Hammer-California, Anette Kubitza, *Re-reading the Readings of the Dinner Party*, 1996, p. 159.
10. Students were invited to participate in making the art works and *pañcāyat* members took upon themselves the cost of materials needed to install the poles.
11. Both quotes, M. Thappan, *Anthropological Journeys; Reflection on Field Work*, Savyasaachi, *Unlearning Fieldwork; The Flight of an Arctic Tern*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1998.
12. Such as, *100 Mahua Trees* (1999) with forest department and children, Modinagar (U.P.), *Between Memory and History* (2001) with documentary film makers and a vocalist, Mumbai, *A dog a dog* (2001) with animation filmmakers, Baroda, *Three Halves* (2001) with two British artists, Liverpool (UK), *From 71 Sites* (2001) with students from Chitra Kala Parishad, Bangalore, and *Where is Cader-Idris* and *Are we Communicating* (2001) with 24 artists from different countries, Wales (UK).


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3

# Art History and Art Practice Today: A Question of Interface

*Anshuman Das Gupta*

## Introduction

On hindsight, if one looks at the past century to place Art History as a discipline there, one is sure to find many confluences/convergences and splits among as many lines as there are schools and groups of thought. This, as one can readily guess, was largely the case with first the continental Europe and then in the United States, and the English-speaking world at large as is variously recognized by scholars placed within those spheres we were accustomed to calling the first world.[1]

I quote therefore from the much read introduction to the book whose subtitle proclaims it to be the "new" Art History from France, the book *Calligram*. The authors are mostly known stalwarts and the introduction is by its editor Norman Bryson whose own works, we know too well by now, render a split into the fundamental of "natural" versus "artificial sign."[2] Talking of the crisis of Art History he says:

> prevailing art history famously insists on limiting itself to 'what was possible in the period'. Its historicism demands a purity or puritanism of perspective in which 'leakage' from the present into the past is viewed with suspicion and alarm.

Yet, he continues,

> this official art history, which consists of the work's production therefore the work's present, is in fact largely uninterested in its own present. The artistic and critical present it actually inhabits.

He continues:

> against this background it is hard to support ignorance necessary to maintain an attitude in which art historian can seem professionally bound to disregard the wider intellectual and artistic activity that summons them.[3]

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After lamenting on the lack of similar theoretical energy in the field in the Anglo-Saxon world which is overtaken by the literary studies, he tries and finds an answer. One answer; the image is not thought of in terms of sign, as something to be interpreted. Academic Art History reacts to the image by seeking documentation: that is where it does its reading — in documents.

Bryson claims that the present volume (i.e., *Calligram*) reacts to images as any other works of signs. It is naturally hermeneutic and knows reading to be as complex and intricate a process, or else as in Warburg iconology is a simple decoding of emblems and motifs. He states that the "status of painting as a sign is fundamental for this alternative of new art history":

He however for all practical purposes remains cryptic. He challenges E.H. Gombrich whom he quotes as saying:

> The emphasis on sign may seem odd. But this must displace perception. It is almost natural for us to think of the idea that painting as a record of perception — the perception that come down to painters from various traditions.

Bryson, however, ends up endorsing E.H. Gombrich's view that by modifying schema one achieves a perceptual end; a totality. This here sounds like a scientificist scheme verging on positivism. Hence by an extension of that idea one could surmise that a modification of that schema brings about new images. If this is to be a theory, it operates without a relata of what it is surrounded by. Thereby it conceives of no obstacles between the painters' perception and viewers.

But, Bryson none the less distinguishes between perception and recognition, to the effect of calling the latter social. The distinction depends on the mediation of perceptualist or sign-recognitionist account of an image. In case of the first one it is a direct process from brush to the eye and in the second one it (i.e., the recognition of painting as sign) spans an arc that extends from person and across individual space.

From a simple theory of sign the interpretive process shifts into the deciphering the signs in their context, we may observe opposing pulls visible through a hole in the sieve of critical apparatus. Despite a widespread aversion to logocentrism, the site of appearance of logos had to be detected and hence for Michael serves talking of Vermeer had to find a co-text in Descartes and his mechanics and finds the logos at an intersection of the painting.[4]

> Representation becomes discursive through the fixed point by which in its turn discourse becomes representative. Here it is that the classical age is summed up and condensed.

**A Question of Interface**

The method: As we have discussed before,

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> Descartes ideas come from those simple mechanics that distribute forces around a fixed point, pulleys, winches and levers. Pascal, Huyghens and Roberval gave their century such a good lesson in how to use the scale and the pendulum that space, time and measuring of time — nature and society — were thought on their model.[5]

It amounted to the discovery of a centre, a practical efficiency of a fixed point, determined once and for all; it awaited mechanisation on mathematisation.

However, getting beyond this syncopated relation of form one could see the devices and discourse that concentrate on eye fooling *trompe-l'oeil* that turns this fixity into a subject-matter, or a set of subject-matters, with some family resemblance.

About *trompe-l'oeil*, there is this situation where only objects have the right to representation yet it is precisely not representation. Yet again "There is no fable, no narrative. No set, no theatre, neither plot nor characters. Trompe-l'oeil forgets all grand themes and distorts them by means of the minor figuration of some object or other." Baudrillard continues, "In Trompe-l'oeil themes become segregated and do not remain the themes of paintings." The central theme of the pictures somewhat suffers "Objects appear in isolation" no longer "figure/objects" no longer random.[6]

And speaking about the interface in this heavily quoted paper, I now could shift the ground to India and to the field of painting in an age when painting appear to have lost most of its ground. Or, so it seems if one follows most of many major discourses, which do their round in the global circulation. (I do remember the threat that anti-aesthetic posed before painting in the forward march of history.)

Baudrillard's description of Trompe-L'oeil (or eye fooling as it literally means) somewhat may seem to fit our category of emergence of painting after painting in India had taken a backseat in the vanguard scenario. And subsequently, in the global scenario painting was received with an amount of skepticism barring in a few cases, with however much of half-wit.[7]

As the new situation that informs painting since the abolition of its auratic role in the international arena comes to convince us in the act of opposition, i.e., objects that would not have a distinct claim to authorship around which aura is constructed. We do encounter cases and arguments in the same area where a possible counterargument may emerge (despite the heavily appropriated field of painting and question of revival).[8]

**The Arguments**

Painting, seen in the context of the situation charted out, may seem to demand/depend on two sets of arguments: one, around the question of frame and framing, and secondly, around the source,[9] that proves vital; in case one probes into the question of authenticity, signature, and aura. When, and especially when the source seem to be photograph, the medium that haunted many painters of nineteenth century even while aiding painting and Art History alike not to speak of the reciprocity of such mutually informed presences.

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For this purpose we may as well take note of the Derridian calling: Philosophy wants to arrange it and cannot manage. But what has produced and manipulated the frame puts everything to work in order to efface the frame effect, most often by naturalising it to infinity, in the hands of God (one can verify this in Kant). Deconstruction must neither reframe nor dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame. These two apparently contradictory gestures are systematically indissociable.[10]

If, going by the Derridian trope of frame, we look into what one called the crisis in/of Art History (with a question mark), and see it together with practices of painting (and the crisis therein) most of many such questions do appear to converge. Coming to the question of sources; the reprographic source is not new to the art of painting as such, the visual field remained studded with references of mutual borrowings, hence when it comes back to us with redoubled energy the question at to "why now" does arise justifiably apart from being a mimetic agent directly connected to the "real" or candidness, despite the history of its manoeuvre telling another and opposing histories.[11] We may listen to Rosalind Krauss who calls attention to Duchampian recovery of photography in its indexical aspects.[12] The split self of Mar-Cel is accorded two different registers throughout the cycle of photo-derived traces.

> This question haunts the entire history of Surrealism, in the process of realising what was absent in the realist narrative of the 'real' i.e., the possibility of a reference, as candid (by proposition) as photograph could act as it's ghost, it's other.

According to Krauss "The photographic images is symbolic or pre-symbolic ceding the language of art back to the imposition of things. . . ."[13] This returning back of a representation to the source may signify a gesturing towards the real, the "real" that was an ever vanishing ever present phenomena to the nineteenth century *Flâneur* comes to find a place in photographic articulation.

**India: Incessantly Gesturing Towards the 'Real'**

Here, for all practical purposes let us remind ourselves what technological modern of which photography is considered an effect was, like its big brother, cinema, made available immediately after its coming into being. But its transactions with the art of painting, however remained indirect, and didn't seem to pose any grave threat to its existence. The role of it had been both personal and public and often forming genres replacing the earlier genres of art.

I mentioned this despite the fact that it was in Baroda way back in the 1960s a group of painters came to confront the question of the ever vanishing ever present presence via the medium of photos and popular art, which however, by now is a part of the art critical lore.

Now, too despite the elusive globalization knocking at the door, one notices curiously and with amusement the fact of the rapidity of this transaction (with photography and reprography in general) quantitatively is maximum in this part of India than elsewhere.

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This, though may sound like some kind of a cultural consensus at best and a neo-compradorism at worst, is willy-nilly accepted by now as a response from this part of the earth to the changed global scenario. A new passport to global citizenship. As it may pose a problematic before social/political scientists and anthropologist (old world) seeking an authentic citizen-subject or national-subject for an aesthete this anti-aesthetic-aesthetics of photo-derived paintings can pose a problem of location. By this, I do not mean to say that the act of painting is so unselfaware as to leave behind its location as *throwing the baby* out with the *bathwater*. On the contrary, the self-awareness is quite close to the exigencies of the post — as in case of the confluence of postcolonial and postmodern.

These sets of photo derivation traverse a borderline discourse of I and the Other, while at times seemingly aware (intuitively) as the case may be of the hyphenated existence.

While we, by now are much too aware of the pointer telling us that subject of Indian history writing has always been the hyper real Europe and the call "to provincialise Europe",[14] there is an indeterminacy in the image world as to who speaks whose tongue, or even the register of the same, the hyper real meanwhile will keep haunting us.

If we take nation as an imagined community a postcolonial nation demands, by the same token the imaging subject in the fast waning field of painting largely skeptical and largely dominated by an overt anti-expressive credo. One revisits the hyper-real in its variegated manifestation as an imagined body as in Surendran Nair, father of the nation as in reprographic stencil (as in Atul Dodiya), crafty image-grafting-sources upon each other — invents a different coding that of colour tinting — as if in a tinted photograph from the past — as if you are watching a Hollywood movie (as in Shibu Natesan) opening a gate to the plethora of painterly challenges. While "originality" lurks as a rare forte in some (Surendran Nair), it is the banishment of the term derived from yesteryears postmodern scenario that works as a substitute for what apparently Descartes taught Vermeer and the *mise'-en-scene* that Andre Bazin has taught our world.

## Notes and References

1. See Bryson's introduction to *Calligram: The New Art History from France*, Cambridge, 1988 and Donald Preziosi's *Rethinking Art History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989.
2. Bryson as quoted by W.J.T. Mitchell in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986.
3. He claims this the third distinctive feature of the new art history from France that date between 1983-88. He provides us with a list of proximity between scholars and their enterprises. (For example, I can include Lebentzein and Jean Baudrillard to Derrida (supplement?) Michael Serres to the field of science, Louis Main to Rhetoric and subjectivity and Julia Kristeva to Psychoanalysis.)
4. Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*, National Gallery Washington.
5. See Serres in *Calligram*, 1988.
6. From Jean Baudrilland, 'The Trompe-L'oeil', *Calligram*, pp. 53-54.

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7. Thomas Lawsons, *"Last Exit: Painting"*, Postmodern Perspectires: Issues in Contemporary Art, ed. Howard Risatti, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1990.
8. Especially remembering the dismembered flak that it receives from the neo-expressionists. And somewhat meteoric emergence and construction of the Trans avant-garde — both of whom may have some implication/impact for the Indian context.
9. The realist assumption of painting as a straight formal representation of the real life more often than not overlooks the aspect of mediation. But when one chooses the photographic source one rule out while vexing the question of mediation.
10. Jacques Derrida as quoted in D. Preziosi, "Modernity Again: The Museum as Trompe-L'oeil", p. 141, in *Deconstruction and the Visual Art*, ed. Peten Brunete and David Willis, Cambridge 1994.
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12. Rosalind Krauss, *Notes on Index*, *October*, the MIT Press, Mas U.S. the first decade 1976-86.
13. Krauss, *op. cit.*, along with this we may as well recall Andre, Bazin, *What is Cinema*? University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974.
14. Dipesh Chakraborty, 'The Difference — Differral of Modernity', *Subaltern Studies*, vol. VIII, 1994, pp. 50-88.

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# 4

# Reading the Regional through Internationalism and Nativism: The Case of Art in Madras; 1950 to 1970*

*Shivaji K Panikkar*

The premise from which I begin is that art of any denomination has never been an end unto itself and that wherever it is produced and viewed, it is for the primary purpose of communication. What is communicated through art is basically its own specific language and it is the way it speaks that affects discourse on itself and the world. Endless discussion about the so-called themes, content and subject-matter is hardly central to understanding art. I believe it would be far more productive to situate the meanings of various languages an artist or a culture produces in terms of ideology. If art is language, then it is, of necessity, received and read as ideological and therefore, art, like other language, is also a tool/medium, through which subjectivity of the art producer is translated, represented and interpreted as meaning. Since languages, including art languages, are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted through play and parody it follows that modern art anywhere is necessarily eclectic and synthetic. The anxiety of originality and of the "pure" is constantly abandoned in favour of reinvention and reinterpretation.

This paper attempts to frame the specificity of modernist experiences in the Madras art scene since 1950s till about late 1970s. It is critical to engage with regional histories of modern art alongside writing national and international histories. Surprisingly, the first ever attempt in writing a book length comprehensive study of Indian painting (and a couple of others that followed), is the book by Neville Tuli, titled *The Flamed-Mosaic: Indian Contemporary Painting*, published as late as 1997.[1] Whatever may be the merits or demerits, or the contribution that it has made to the development and promotion of contemporary Indian art, it largely forecloses the specificity of regional/local traditions, as it anxiously proposes a ". . . universalist and holistic wisdom . . ."[2] of an imagined India. Spread across

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the text, the implication for local priorities and regionalism in culture and economy for Tuli are negative aspects, which he equates with communal-narrow-mental-rigidities. Plurality to the author is a threat, and his idealistic concerns of all-encompassing aesthetic and creativity becomes pure categories of spiritual vision. The anxiety ridden search for India's unique universal foundation in art leaves out much of the unique dynamics, struggles and polemic with in the regions.

Two decades before Tuli's book another exemplary book was published on contemporary Indian artists,[3] where, through a set of six artists' life and works, the author maps a shift over from the internationalism/"westernism" to indigenism/"Indianism", covering " . . . a range of sensibilities and ideas . . . ."[4] Even if, neither democracy in the choice of the artist is what one may expect or demand from the author, nor adding up or fitting in the artists and sensibilities that are left out in some kind of hierarchical order, one may still find that the unilinear schema that the book proposes for "modern art in India" privileges artists having the potential to stand in line for progressivism or vanguardism is an anomaly. The selection of a few artists from two metropolises, while leaving out many others and other locations, makes the project of defining the national modern a reductive process that simplifies complexities. Such a conception does not perhaps allow making the national modern to be viewed in all its plurality even as it indirectly implies that artists who do not fit into the schema were somehow less progressive or rear-guard.

The issue I am raising takes into consideration the projects that continue to make claims for a national Art History, and yet overlook the specific dynamics that constitute the regional/local experiences of making and viewing art. In fact, these should determine the chequered and uneven career graph of a national modernity. Another manner of tracking the trajectory of the development of modern art in India traces the Art History of the nation from a very narrow premise of constructing an avant-garde.[5] It brings into linear order the Bombay Progressives, the Group 1890, the exhibition *Place for People*, the Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association and to the diversification in the mediums of art production in the last decade. The shape of this history may be also seen as an inherent limitation of art criticism, which may be largely determined by the taste and the specific ideological project of the writer. Omitting regional experiences of a specific nature, and the very under-privileging of local histories while constructing particular kinds of national trajectories lead to the issue of the marginalization of traditions and the diverse lineage that should be ideally constitutive of our national history. These ignored margins need to be pulled back into the frame even at the risk of disturbing the cleanliness of a unilinear schema of a possible national avant-garde. Through this, it would be also possible to analyze the ideological premises of how and why the national avant-garde histories are written as they are.

Writing regional histories should not be misunderstood as a form of separatism nor in terms of an art historical democracy. Since experiences of modernity are varied and specific in different locations, what the regional histories would enable is an understanding of specific conditions in which certain kinds of art are produced within specific internal dynamics and polemics. Rather, the

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characteristic aspects of the regional histories would set up cases that sustain themselves in relationship to the national and international historical constructions.

In a sense, this paper is an attempt to open out the question of the regional modern. At one level this paper is an attempt to sketch out a regional history, specifically the history of the Madras art school at a particular point of time. At another level, this paper is concerned with the nature of the differences between the ideology of "Internationalism" and "Nativism", as these are precisely the nodes that determine the criss-cross patterns in the art (language) history of Madras to a large extent.

Regional histories of modernism in India necessarily would be distinct from one another. One exemplary case of writing the Art History of a city needs be quoted as a case having quite a distinct scope, in comparison with the developments in Madras. The book titled *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, is particularly centred around the development of the Faculty of Fine Arts of M.S. University of Baroda.[6] It is significant that Gulammohammed Sheikh draws attention to the fact that

> Studying the art scene of a region or a city entails other questions of identity. It is important to note in the context that Baroda remained engaged in the national debate on issues of art, entering on occasion into international dialogue. *Its identity was never subsumed by the region.*[7] [Emphasis added]

In fact, it may also be taken into consideration that the art community in Baroda had been composite, drawing its members from all over the country and even abroad, which in fact subsumes the local historical currents in a major manner. It can also be seen that Baroda as an art centre is predominantly an extension of Bombay and Delhi. And one may also acknowledge as an extension that the divide between North India and the south in terms of aspects of culture and politics are sharper compared to the differences between the west, east and the centre of the northern country. It may be also taken into the view that if one were writing a history of art in Gujarat, or western India as a whole one would have to devise an altogether different paradigm to work with.

## Making of the Regional Modern: Internationalism

As a transitional period, the entry of Debi Prosad Roy Chowdhury (1899-1975) as the first native Principal of the Govt. School of Art and Craft, Madras[8] had many far-reaching reverberations as far as the development of modernism in art in the city is concerned. By 1957, the year when Roy Chowdhury retired, much against his comfort, an academically established, formalist, self-conscious and socially visible credo of the international quasi-figurative modernism had already become an established reality. A rebel disciple of Abanindranath Tagore[9] himself, and a modernist of the sorts, from about 1935 till the end of his art career Roy Chowdhury adhered to the typical academic-neoclassic style of the professional sculptors of his times, having a certain rather unclear alliance with Auguste Rodin. His large-scale sculptural compositions and public sculptural portraits of 1940s

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and 1950s were thus a bit obsolete in the context of the new developments in the art that was brewing from the late 1940s. And moreover, he was not favourably disposed to modernism on the progressive lines, and even antagonistic to those.[10] Lacking the intellectual quest on the modernist-progressive lines of an artist, in the School curriculum he largely adhered to non-intellectual, craft-skill oriented "styles;" the British academic water-colour painting, modeling and Bengal Revivalistic modes.[11] Despite such limitations, Roy Chowdhury's Western and Revivalist artistic styles were much appreciated by common people.

K.C.S. Paniker (1911-77) had joined as a student in the Madras Art School in 1936, and became the Principal after Roy Chowdhury retired. Since mid-1940s, Paniker had been seen as a major avant-garde figure in the development of art in Madras.[12] Somewhere along the line, between 1948 and 1950 the old and the new Principals had parted ways in their artistic choices, programmes and ideology. This indeed was due to Paniker's personal initiatives and above all a reflection of changing times; at this point the young generation of artists at all the major metropolises in the country yearned to make new art, and Madras was no exception. And, to the displeasure of the conventionally oriented viewers of art (there is considerable evidence of this in contemporary journalistic writings), he had discarded the Revivalist style of the Bengal School and the European academic realism, and inspired his younger colleagues and students to paint "modern pictures." Like elsewhere Paniker and his younger progressive associates drew inspiration largely from the Parisian art of Impressionism and post-Impressionism.

Talented youngsters who gravitated to Madras School at this point were quite large, which included the Tamilians such as S. Dhanapal, A.P. Santhanaraj, L. Munuswamy and Antony Doss. Due to the presence of Paniker, and since Malabar was part of the then Madras Presidency, Malayālīs such as M.V. Devan, M.V. Krishnan, K.M. Vasudevan Namboodiri, Kamala Poduval (later the wife of Pradosh Das Gupta), among a number of others and Rama Bai of South Kanara (who later married K.C.S. Paniker) had joined. Apart from these, due to Roy Chowdhury, there was a large contingent of Bengalis such as Gopal Ghose, Parithosh Sen, Pradosh Das Gupta and Sushil Kumar Mukherjee at that point studying in Madras School.

Gripped by the fascination for the new, and within the impressionist-expressionist credo, Paniker's paintings through 1950s are ambitious in range and scale. Often he resolved the contextual relevance of what he painted within his thematic choices[13] and his works of early 1950s surely stand out among his younger colleagues. The leap that he took from his rather grim early works in the style of revivalism and academic naturalism, to the modest water-colours of the Malabar rustic landscapes, which preserve fluent masterly handling, too were a step ahead of his contemporaries. Their robust lyricism is earthy, and the clear structural quality and tonal planes vaguely remind one of his source, Paul Cézanne. Soon he brings in figures into his larger compositions in oils and his source shifts to Vincent Van Gogh, particularly in their gestured linear constructions, painterly marks and openness of composition combining figures and spaces.[14] Expressive colour applications ranged between dark

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sensual evocations to bright outbursts of passionate reds, oranges, greens and yellows. Much of his works of the first half of 1950s progressively display complexity in figural integration, and structured rhythmic articulation.

Initiated by Paniker, there had been great enthusiasm in the younger generation to draw inspiration from the modern art and artists.[15] The younger students in the art school and his later colleagues, particularly, M.V. Devan,[16] Munuswamy, Santhanaraj, Antony Doss, Reddappa Naidu, P.K. Prabhakar, L. Shanmugha Sundaram and a number of other artists imbibed the modern spirit in their works by late 1950s. Highly academic, their paintings are characterised by a modernist, angular and design-like simplification of figure with expressive surfaces done with knife or brush with highly textured and anti-naturalistic colouration. On the whole, from hindsight, this modernism in many cases may have been a rather tame and moderate kind, which had to possibly negotiate and comply itself with the conventional social expectations, and the constrictions imposed by the art school set-up. However, the paintings of Munuswamy and Santhanaraj of this period are exceptionally adventurous in their expressive distortions and simplifications of the human figure.

**Making of the Regional Modern: Nativism[17]**

Although Paniker's whole-hearted enthusiasm for the Parisian modernism lasted only for about a decade, subsequently he necessarily had to arrive at a synthetic vision that gave space for pre-modern Indian traditions and modern western artistic advancements. This was arrived at through two distinct phases. The first was when he was engaged with much-modified Jamini Roy like figure compositions on a much larger scale and import in the later part of 1950s and early 1960s. The second that followed with a quasi-abstract mode of pictorial language that he developed from 1963 and followed until his death. These distinct phases in his works were definitely due to his tremendous intellectual quest and intuitive sensibility as an artist.

Writing from a nationalist point of view in November 1954, Paniker wrote critically about the impact of the colonial rule and exploitation, rejected the Bengal Revivalist movement, and urged an art on a modern-national premise. This was his first visible step towards a contextually relevant Indian modernism. To quote,

> Progressive artists of all shades of opinion in India today are convinced that this country is heading toward a vigorous art movement which should develop *her national art on modern lines*.[18] [Emphasis added]

As yet, it is evident that there is no indication of a definitive nativist preoccupation in his thought. The nativist/nationalist alternative for a language in art was a slow and a tedious search for all who were concerned. This was so particularly since the need for a native language was a haunting preoccupation in the later half of 1950s, and yet, it was not so uncomplicated as to realize itself easily, since very many contradictory options had to be negotiated.

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The origin of Paniker's preoccupation with the ideology of nativism can be traced back to 1954. Reacting to his paintings exhibited in London in the same year, in a personal correspondence to Paniker, in November 1954, British art critic Ludwig Goldscheider remarked,

> A European artist is faced only with the art of his own past (from the times of the Greeks to Picasso) but he can safely ignore the East. . . . An Indian artist on the other hand, cannot merely study the Ajanta and Tanjore wall paintings and imitate them on a smaller scale — this would not make him a modern master: he has to go through the school of world art. But to become a genuine artist he is not allowed to forget or suppress his racial and national way of seeing, feeling and shaping — he has to be an Indian artist or nothing at all. In the end his painting will be as different from all European art as the thinking of India. Upanishads and Buddha are different from European thought. (No true message without that difference.)

And further he wrote,

> You are one of the very few Indian painters who went through the ordeal of western teaching and came out unbroken. Your paintings are not translations from the French . . . neither are they enlarged Indian miniatures or reduced Indian rock paintings. They are as competent as anything done by younger European painters and at the same time they are very Indian. . . . The last ones are even very good paintings. I believe that in the future they will become still better and still more Indian. (Your colour can already compete with the best work of Ancient India, but your lines have not yet the full charm and rhythm of Indian drawing. I am confident that you will reach this too.)[19]

Paniker quotes the above in a 1954 exhibition catalogue and concludes thus, "Mr. Goldscheider has rightly emphasised the importance of the study of world art for the development of modern Indian art."[20] Although Goldscheider's demand that Paniker should be a native in his artistic choices, it is not quite surprising that what Paniker picks up from the art critic is an internationalism, an attitude informed by his progressive outlook.

However, the idea of a native/racial/national art had caught on. Paniker must have read and thought over the above quoted piece of art criticism from Goldscheider several times until it becomes a truly haunting search for him. And through the later half 1950s, Paniker and his sculptor colleague S. Dhanapal (1919-2000) had, in fact, been collaboratively searching for a figuration that could stand-in for a typically native approach. Although Paniker, in his works of later half of 1950s and early 1960s (such as his '*Garden*' series *Pl.* 14), could not easily do away with the post-impressionist brush-work deriving from Van Gogh, the figuration assumed a mode of stylization, and the compositions themselves were based on Ajanta and other mural traditions, such as Lepakshi. Particularly significant

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is the Jamini Roy-like enlarged heads, pictured from higher eye level and seen in perspective of the figures themselves, which lent a native appearance to the paintings. Further, his themes, too, were deliberately chosen to be "Indian," of the village, or of historical narrative. Dhanapal's sculptures of this period also displayed iconicity and frontality, and he thus became the originator of a particular kind of nativist language in sculpture in the southern region[21] (*Pl.* 13). It was this language that was taken up and experimented with by younger student artists.

Pursuing his demand further, in September 1960 Goldscheider wrote to Paniker again saying,

> May I say again that I do like your work. But I believe that you ought to go on in your struggle of *disentangling your style from Western influences*. This you have done now to a certain extent, not quite enough.[22] [Emphasis added]

Significantly, in 1961, in the editorial note of the very first issue of *Artrends*, an art periodical brought out by Paniker and his associates, quotes Goldscheider's comments of 1954.[23] The editorial of the next issue of the journal points out that

> There is evidence to show that the Indian artist is already beginning to be conscious of the ultimate requirement that his art has to be the expression of the innermost spirit of his people, to be of any real value to the outer world. It is here that tradition and usage come in again.[24]

Also significantly, the very first issue of *Artrends* carries on its cover a painting by Jamini Roy (*Christ and Joseph*, 1949) and on the editorial page a painting by Paniker titled *Spring* (1960). *Spring* brings alive the Roy's primitivism through the tilted large heads and eyes of two female figures with diminutive bodies.

About 1963, Paniker had resolved a number of formal and ideological issues raised in the context of nativism/"Indianness" (his series *Words and Symbols* 1963 to 1977 (*Pl.* 63)). He rejected the earlier mode of expressionistic brushwork and arrived at a highly graded, overall flat pictorial space, overlaid with totally relaxed linear representational and abstract images. Indeed, his language largely derived from quasi-religious sources such as the engraved or written charts such as those found in horoscopes, traditional cryptic pictograms, and Malayalam script used, not as written text itself, but as a visual element. Although his inspiration had been also Paul Klee, he deliberately rejected any surreal intent. Further, Paniker also definitively kept aside the spiritual (in an esoteric sense), and continued to remain within the figurative-narrative and expressionistic mode, concentrating much on the visual impact of his works. At the most, one may consider the dazzling brilliance and delight that manifests in most of his works of this phase as a celebration of an inner opulence and richness, much like an imaginary paradise.

At about the same time, under the influence of Paniker's ideas, M. Reddappa Naidu (1932-1999) also rejected the internationalist mode, and arrived at an "Indian" linear composition based on

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religious icons. He made the argument that these sources were the least influenced by any "alien" traditions. The minimal, nervous mode of drawing, the exploration of abstract values of colour, and the discrete use of rich and rare decorative motifs deriving from the textile traditions, make his art visually close to the traditional world-view of a believer. A similar yet distinct mode of iconicity, myth and primitivism also informs the paintings of J. Sultan Ali, which offer a re-take of the decorative figuration of K. Sreenivasulu's angular stylization of figuration.

In the late 1950s and 1960s many students were searching for a language independent of international modernism, a trend that became the quest for the School, both in painting and sculpture. Many students who joined in subsequent batches since Paniker took over as the Principal in 1957 can be seen very quickly developing individual approaches in relation to the pedagogy grounded in the native sources, while also keeping an open eye towards world art. Paniker and his staff also inculcated in the young students a yearning for creating personal, intimate individual styles, even while the classroom exercises ranged between the normativity of academic realism to post-impressionistic simplification and stylization. The "creative" experimentation of the students was seen outside these, which were largely explored outside the stipulated class timings. The teachers worked on their creative compositions in the presence of the students in the classroom, which gave opportunities to the students to watch and follow the creative possibilities of their skills. In turn the students showed their creative works to the teachers and received remarks. It is this guidance and flexibility in experimentation that enabled the younger students to develop their personal styles which were nevertheless deeply indebted to the experimentation of the older artists.

In sculpture, through the combined influence of Dhanapal and Paniker, young art students, Kanai Kunhiraman and P.V. Janakiram (1930-95), emerged on the art scene from the early 1960s onwards through to the 1970s. These sculptors successfully used iconicity, frontality, decorativeness, linearity and traditional imagery combined with the use of traditional technique of metal *repousse* (*kavaca* tradition), for other conventional and unconventional materials, to fashion a nativist sculptural style. Although this forms the major trend in sculpture, it may be noted that there were other individual initiatives in sculpture, such as the scrap-metal welded works of S. Kanniappan, which signalled the simultaneous presence of internationalism and nativism in the Madras art scene in the 1960s.

One of the key directions that were taken in nativising modern sculptural language was the strategic use of the crafts manly techniques by Kanai Kunhiraman and Janakiram which could be easily drawn from the craft departments of the School. They also initiated the utilisation of traditional forms/themes (particularly deriving from the North Kerala folk performing art, like *Theyyam* in the former, and traditional Hindu, and occasionally Christian iconography in the latter). The earliest manifestation of such direction is Kunhiraman's *Amma* (1962), done in copper *repousse*, followed by a number of versions of the same theme in stone and cement, which are frontal, iconic, linear and decorative. Adding pieces of metal in varied shapes, Janakiram often layered and repeated, creating

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textural variations and the visual rhythm that add up a great deal to the quality of the beaten and welded overall form of his creations.

There is a re-take of nativism in sculpture in the form of a "primitivism" in the early works (early 1970s) of S. Nandagopal and S. Paramasivam, each one distinct in their own approach. The former details decorative motifs and figural images upon more or less two-dimensional surfaces of his frontal sculptures. Drawn quality (as indexes of "Indianness" and of the native/folk/primitive roots), the crafts manly finish, are markers of this shift-over. The local and regional identity is also asserted through motifs such as animal and tree forms, and elementary shapes of human and deity images. Adding a great variety of textural details by welding, punching, electroplating, etc., and adding colours to his sculptures, his works at times grow like an organism, seemingly unpremeditated and natural. In Paramasivam's work, the primitive elements however are more universal in appeal. The folkish aspect of T.R.P. Mookiah and P.S. Nandhan also fall within these general trends.

Whereas within the context of the concern for nativism, sculpture picked up an entirely new approach and innovative format based on traditional craftsmanly skills and forms within the national modern, painting in the 1960s relatively took the direction of a freer and more personalized expression of landscape/figure-based narration. Drawing, however, was the major linking factor, and it is here that the artists of Madras excelled at this time. Drawn with a flowing ease, the candid line also becomes the major structuring element both in sculpture and painting. The highly simplified, and often casual looking drawing that in a number of young artists develops in the mid 1960s can be traced back to the pioneering innovations in the late 1950s through the early 1960s in this direction by painter-teachers, Santhanaraj, Munuswamy and the senior student Reddappa Naidu.

In painting, from around 1963 through early 1970s multiple linguistic directions emerged on the scene. One of them can be characterized as a mode of lyrical and romantic language, which enabled a metaphoric, surreal, fantastic and even allegorical mode of picturing paintings. The predominantly flat linear compositions of K. Ramanujam, T.K. Padmini, S.G. Vasudev, V. Arnawaz, R. Varadarajan, Akkitam Narayanan, Rani Nanjappa, V. Viswanathan, Fredrick Chellappa, A.S. Jagannathan, Susai Raj, D. Venkatapathy, K.V. Haridasan, R.B. Bhaskaran, A. Alphonso, M. Senathipathi, A.C.K. Raja among others, either display intensity of libidinal desires and expressionism, a carefree romantic decorative flourish or a silent disquietude in varying degrees.

These young artists take on largely from the combined influences of their painter-teachers, Paniker, Santhanaraj, Munuswamy and Anthony Doss's works, apart from those from the senior student, Reddappa Naidu. Influences from elsewhere include the linear facility and decoration of Laxman Pai, F.N. Souza, K. Ambadas, Badri Narayan, apart from the general influence of the primitivism of Paul Gaugin and Paul Klee and to a lesser degree, Cubism. However, the eclecticism surely was all directed towards asserting particular modes of nativism by bringing in myth, allegory, and romance through the images of the idyllic landscapes, and some fantastic nature-human combinations and juxtapositions.

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Most of them painted landscape based idyllic scenes, if the figure is not presented in close-up. The female nudes of Viswanathan (1964), with script written around, is a clear example of the identification of figure (female) with nature, the sexual desire almost totally transcended. "Fantasy", "Apparition" and the like are the titles preferred by many artists for their paintings. Vasudev worked with one dominant colour and using rich range of tonality. The gentle and continuous play with colour and tones, the skeletal and minimal lines and in the large spaces where mirage like happenings occur have the air of fantasy and are characteristic features of his and Arnawaz's works (*Pl.* 17). Surreal, symbolic, sad and serious, terrifying, vehement expressionist colours characterize the philosophically oriented works of V.M. Sadanandan and A.C.K. Raja. They are apparently concerned about mysteries of life, and a certain intensity of passion too is obvious (see the titles of works as *Agony*, *Death* and *To Dust Thou Returnest*). The 1970s also saw the particular versions of nativism in the works of P. Gopinath, who rather loosely floated organic and geometric shapes and forms, and created brisk, staccato rhythmic movements that are coordinated by the ground colour and relatively fainter linear overall spatial scaffoldings. Since the later half of the 1970s the horizon reappeared, which coincides with a renewed interest in nature and its myriad organic forms in his series *Biomorphic Images* (*Pl.* 67).

Among them, it is Ramanujam (1941-73) who stood out and threaded a trajectory in life and art that destabilized the sense of normalcy for many. Haunted by fear of loneliness, his drawings and paintings peopled by strange presence of hybrid creatures, clouds and water, and the fantastic architectural structures that created tremendous experiences of spatial expansion and dizziness by manipulating scale and relations, in which his idealised self travelled in the company of *apsaras* and *nāgakanyā*s (*Pl.* 16). Cruelly handicapped in more than one way, and a recluse, his art apart from raising questions regarding the larger issues of tradition and modernity, proves above all that personal myth-making is possible through art, and raises questions of subjectivity, and as to what art can mean for a possible survival of the human spirit. By the early 1970s he was financially secure through the sales of his works. However, his suicide foreclosed that utopia that the weakest of the weak could also hope for survival, and possibly proved that the demands of life are more than what art can lend, and what life needs to fetch for individual's survival.

Of those times, one does not also fail to notice strength and power, and a strong sense of subjectivity in T.K. Padmini with all its woman-centred luxuriance and desires; the moonlit mysteriousness of landscapes that hold the romance of lovers, and the warmth the mothers feel for their children (*Pls.* 69 to 72). She died young, and so also Arnawaz. These tragedies still remain inscribed and are remembered largely within the confines of the regional memory.

**Subsistence: Art and Craft, and Crafty Art?**

In the context of the highly limited career opportunities, the credit of imagining a survival through an artists' co-operative community goes to K.C.S. Paniker.[25] It was his foresight that enabled a

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possibility of an alternative mode of practice where art and craft could be practised in support of one another.[26] He envisaged it as an alternative means to the artist's dependence on a full-time job (teaching or in a design institution) or survival as an artist with meager possible sales through private galleries (as such Madras in the 1960s had just one commercial art gallery). Talking about how artists have to earn a living without having to commercialize or compromise on art, Paniker pointed out that, "To resolve the dilemma, we sought inspiration from the past, art and craft has always existed side by side, India's greatest craftsmen have also been her great artists."[27]

The take off point to this was the 1963-64 experimentation with *batik* under the initiative of Paniker in the School, where the students produced large scale cloth material in this medium which were sold out in the exhibition that followed in the School premises itself (*Pl.* 15). Victoria Technical Institute, a handicraft selling shop in the city, had sponsored this batik exhibition. Further on the Artists Handicrafts Association was formed and the idea of setting-up an artists' commune was mooted in 1964 with 25 members which grew into about 80 members in two years time. The sales helped creating financial base for buying land needed for the artist's village by the individual artists. Paniker's aspiring young students of at the School of Art; Vasudev, Jayapala Panicker, Viswanathan, Ramanujam, Adimoolam, Anila Jecob, Arnawaz, Vishwanathan, among a number of others joined in; making a life through the simultaneous practice of craft and art. By April 1966 Cholamandal artist's village was a formally established reality. Apart from the regular sales of *batik* textiles through Victoria Technical Institute, further large commissions arranged by the Institute, from Italy (1967) and U.S.A. enabled the financial security of most of the young artists who had joined in. In 1967, the support of the Government was also sought for this.[28] There had been also a number of successful exhibitions of handicrafts (ceramic, *batik* textiles, metal objects, leather and lacquer objects) of Cholamandal artists in Bangalore, Bombay and Hyderabad through the late 1960s and early 1970s.

If not for any other reason, the commune was born out of a sheer necessity. The Cholamandal enterprise surely was also a definitive step in the direction of contextualising art practice from the vantage point of an Indianizing artistic endeavour, creating a possibility where art and craft could freely interact with one another. As M.V. Devan points out, it was an attempt in socializing contemporary art, and further he added that the attempt was to help the living elements of Indian traditional art to be brought into contemporary relevance, and was to help in reducing the gap between the art and craft.[29]

However, a glance at the reports that have been published in various newspapers from around 1970 of the Cholamandal crafts exhibitions indicate a certain deterioration of the project itself. The reports describe these as "disappointing from the point of view of artistic value", and as "devoid of conceptual and aesthetic significance."[30] Or,

> There seems to be a reluctance on the part of these otherwise enterprising souls to branch out into new directions or to take the risk of deviating from a set, symmetrical

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> arrangement of motif . . . ultimately one gets tired of seeing the same creatures being harnessed to the innocuous purpose of decoration.[31]

The above comments are symptomatic of a deeper crisis that was inherent in the Cholamandal project of practicing art and craft side by side. Apart from the limitation that the craft objects produced were repetitive, progressively in the cases many artists, art itself had been slowly getting reduced to sheer decorative craftmanly formalism. They neither presented any deep philosophical inquiry or any specific concern for contemporary relevance that modern art practice anywhere would entail or, the use of craft as a purposeful ideological strategy contesting any established norms or canons. And, as time went by craft practices as such got much reduced, and a number of artists repeatedly painted or sculpted the forms of Hindu deities derivative folk images or Tāntric diagrams, and the like. These, in cases merely repeated themselves displaying certain glib craftsmanly techniques, merely creating variations in forms, much of it today is directed to the tourist market.

**Voices of Differences: A Matter of Art Language?[32]**

These developments in art in the three decades of the post-independence period in Madras call us to look at certain other specific premises. One such is the State's patronage, support and interference. Until the time of the establishment of Cholamandal artists' village, and almost until Paniker's retirement as the Principal of the College of Art in 1967, the political support of Congress government to the modern art movement in Madras was a fact; it was a reality and at the least indirect.[33] The obvious fact that Paniker became a successful leader-organizer of the Madras art circle in 1950s and 1960s was largely due to his political connections, and the support he sought from the ruling government. This is apart from his credentials as an artist. And, if political interference from the ruling government was not obvious and proclaimed as a given agenda, the artist's political affinities nevertheless were not too unclear.[34]

And, the shift in political power and leadership, the rise into power of the Tamil regional party *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK, established 1949) forming the government in Tamil Nadu in 1967, which stood for a sovereign Tamil Nadu had far-reaching effects on the Madras art scenario. However, DMK's political agenda possibly only had an indirect impact on artistic choices of Tamil artists of the gallery, but surely has had its impact on the public culture.[35]

Even then, it is a fact that art world in Madras since about 1967-68 was divided, and major differences of opinions and disputes, mostly on artistic grounds or on the value, purpose and mode of functioning of the Cholamandal co-operative had emerged. If not on avowed political lines, questions of Tamil and non-Tamil identities certainly structured these differences in important ways. DMK's atheism and anti-upper-caste ideology anti-Hindi agitation apart, Tamil nationalism particularly had virtually divided the artist's community here into two sides, of the Tamil side and the Malayali (and the Malayali supporting Tamilians) on the other side. The situation particularly

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was manifest in the Cholamandal artist's commune, where Tamil artists largely dropped out of the commune, or continued to remain in opposition. One obvious manifestation was the DMK government's rejection of Paniker's request for extension of the position of Principal in the Art College, and the government's silence (read as disclaim) about Paniker's life long collection of his own paintings, drawings and sculptures which were then taken over by the Kerala government and made into a permanent museum/gallery in Thiruvananthapuram.[36]

135371

The development of art languages is a story apart. Throughout the three decades there existed a sharp line of difference between the internationalists and nativists. Santhanaraj, a Tamil Christian with a profoundly bohemian personality drew and painted with an absolute ease and spontaneity. Primarily, he remained a realist of sorts, since his lines, however simplified and stylised, conjured a sense of real and sensual, particularly in his female figuration; it had nothing, so to say, with Paniker's call for Indianness. Although his use of decorative marks and motifs upon the drawn figure in the late 1950s through early 1960s lend them a feel of a quasi-nativist sensibility he remained a humanist, eclectic, wild, unconventional and free of nativist ideological encumbrances.

But surely it is Munuswamy who, from 1959 through the early 1960s takes a virtual leap in terms of pictorial vocabulary asserting internationalism (*Pl.* 64). Bypassing nativist considerations as well as any fidelity to realism, the expressive mode of drawing and colouring espoused by him verges on the expressionist-surrealist automatic mode and can even be characterized as a minimalist forceful method of gesture making art. Apart from the fact that this language allowed a facility for passionate outpouring, it also allowed the beginning of the assertion of autonomy of pictorial elements, which from the 1980s onwards assume a minimalist expressionistic credo, unparalleled in the art scene in Madras.

As Munuswamy (and Santhanaraj to a lesser extent) kept away from the concerns of the ideology of nativism delineated by Paniker throughout their art career, and pursued an art language that asserted internationalism, painting with distinct local and personal linguistic inflexions. This artistic trajectory, which obviously lends a variety to artistic choices and resolutions, manifests differently in the works of K.M. Adimoolam, K. Damodaran, R.B. Bhaskaran and C. Dakshinamoorthy.

For Adimoolam (*Pl.* 65) and Damodaran choice of landscape based abstraction of internationalist propensity meant a rejection of the nativist agenda, and also transgressing the Paniker's view that Indian art can ever be totally abstract or autonomous, having no reference to phenomenal world. Damodaran takes an extreme position in this, construing that historically, the total abstraction of Modernism as the ultimate development in art. Bhaskaran too rejected an obvious Indianness as superficial and in the 1970s developed a language that was highly eclectic. The play of sexuality in his works is evocative and suggestive and was unprecedented in the Madras scene. For example, from libidinal sources he drew images of double hills, phallic legs and tails or legs of cats and phallic arrows.

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Holding to an extremist position within the nativist agenda of K.C.S. Paniker, K.V. Haridasan polemically brought in the flatly painted Kerala ritual geometric abstract diagrams (*padma*, done with powder colours, also called *dhūli-citram*) and the abstract Tāntric symbolism based on the concept of primordial union of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* by about 1967-68. He rejected the rather superficial and "arty" nativist mode of Paniker. However, it may be noted that Haridasan's claim to an authentic tradition indeed may be an end in itself, but it possibly does not lend itself to other significant directions.

Since late 1970s there may be only a few artists in Madras who would locate their concerns within the definition of nativism. Or, despite what an artist might claim for a nativist import, like in works of Achutan Kudallur (*Pl.* 68), on a purely formalist ground would also assume a clearly international inclination. So also K. Muralidharan's paintings which display the dimensions of native characters and narrative language of a primitivist propensity do not spring from a defined premise of nativism. What then he effects possibly is the interplay of these positions and the creation of a synthetic pictorial vocabulary. Valsan Kolleri, a prominent sculptor of this generation too does not engage himself with the art on the defined premise of Indianness. This is possibly true also of the generation artists such as Rm. Palaniappan, C. Douglas, Vasudha Thozur, D. Ebenezer, Natesh, Balasubra-maniyam, and a number of others who have been trained in Madras.

**Conclusion**

Rather than considering the above sketch as the single and singular trajectory of modernity in Madras that engaged with internationalism and nativism in a unique mode, it would be useful to examine these tendencies in juxtaposition with similar national trends elsewhere. The regional aspects of these trends, however, are specific to its own location. The purpose of such specificity is neither to essentialize the region nor to mark it off as a closed entity. On the other hand, it would certainly be productive to understand regional specificities as well as regional aspirations to engage with the national and international from the region. In that sense the present attempt is directed towards an analysis of the interface between the regional, the national and the international. This would necessarily involve an analysis of resistances and strategies at the regions towards the national and international, as much as the reexamination of mainstream histories.

The above sketch of art developments in Madras city in a linear manner obviously has omitted so much of its own margins. I am thinking of the art and its making from P. Perumal to Chandru; who through negotiations with tradition and modernity live out complex subaltern struggles that deserve to be considered on their own terms, as also R. Varadarajan, A. Alphonso, D. Venkatapathy, M. Senathipathy, P.B. Surendradranath, and so many others for their negotiations and for varied compulsions that impinge on the question of art. One last word — since the object of this paper was to locate the history of art in Madras through an examination of the dialectics of the regional and the national, the paper had to overlook other possible dynamics and tensions within the regional.

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2. *Ibid.*, Foreword.
3. Geeta Kapur, *Contemporary Indian Artists*, Vikas Publishers, New Delhi, 1978.
4. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
5. Ref. Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism* (the essay with the same title), Tulika, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 297-324.
6. Gulammohammed Sheikh (ed.), *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1997.
7. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 13.
8. D.P. Roy Chowdhury had been the Principal of the School from 1929 to 1957.
9. Stella Kramrisch had hailed young Chowdhury as the "classic of the new generation". However, he had rebelled against the style of Abanindranath, and his *guru* had no soft corner for him, reports K.C.S. Paniker. Further he relates the anecdote thus, "When a small group of his Madras students announced themselves at Jorasanko, the ancient home of the Tagores, Abanindranath told them: "Debi (Chowdhury) was here. Told me he was a sculptor. I told him he was a potter". However Chowdhury was too well known at the time as a virile new voice to be easily silenced." (Ref. K.C.S. Paniker, 'Wrestler in the Art School', *The Indian Express*, Saturday, 18 October 1975.)
10. Roy Chowdhury kept out of the exhibitions of younger artists either of the Progressive Painter's Association at Madras, or other such activities (ref. K.C.S. Paniker, Devi Prosad Roy Chowdhury, *Chitram*, March, 1976, p. 7), and the three All India Khadi, Swadeshi and Industrial Exhibition of 1947, 1948 and 1949-50.
11. Although K.C.S. Paniker points out that Chowdhury tried to evolve a synthesis of Indian and western art, which may not be totally wrong. *Ibid.*
12. In 1944, the Madras Progressive Painter's Association was formed, and exhibitions were held every 3-4 months.
13. A lot of Paniker's works of this period display his humanitarian disposition. Painted as grand themes, the narrative in these evokes piety and compassion.
14. Talking about such shifts he mentions that "Ravi Varma, Lady Pentuland, Cotman, Frank Brangwyn, Vangogh, Gugin, Matisse, the Fauves and so on, may have come and gone as major influences one after the other. At times I used to be gripped of these several ones at once". K.C.S. Paniker, 'Why do I Paint?', (in Malayālam), *Sameeksha* quarterly, no. 16, July-September, Madras, 1971.
15. There is a large-scale migration of Malayālīs intellectuals, literary persons and art students to Madras from 1940s through 1960s. Kerala had a major literary movement at this time, exemplified by the large scale socially committed literature, there had also been Progressive Writers conferences at Trichur in 1947 and at Kollam in 1948. Leading politically motivated writers, M.P. Paul, J. Mundasseri, Thakzi Shivashankara Pillai among others, were forceful in molding the social sensibility. In Madras, along with the progressive artists, the inspired Communist thinker and activist M. Govindan, began to bring out a journal in Malayālam, *Navasahiti* (New Literature) edited by M.V. Devan during 1949-50, and brought out 6 issues. During the release of the first issue of the journal, a play written by Devan on the life of Cézanne, *Mahānāya Kalakāran — Cézanne* ('The Great Artist-Cezanne') was put up at the Museum theatre, which later on was published in *Matrubhumi* weekly. P. Bhaskaran, a poet of much repute, acted as Cézanne. The chief guest was the Communist thinker Harindranath Chattopadhyaya.
16. In 1952 after completing studies in Madras, Devan returned to Kerala and joined *Matribhumi* weekly


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as assistant editor, and functioned also as an artist-illustrator till 1961. From 1961 onwards he returned to Madras at the insistence of Paniker and M. Govindan, and was at the Southern Language Book Trust as Editor of Malayalam section briefly, and then as Secretary, Lalit Kala Academy 1962 to 1968.

17. The term 'Nativism' used here, refers ironically to the colonial connotation of the natives as a less civilised people, and is used in the context and content and spirit of de-colonising.
18. K.C.S. Paniker, Catalogue of the eleventh annual exhibition of The Progressive Painter's Association, Madras, November, 1954.
19. Personal letter of the art critic Ludwig Goldscheider to Paniker dated 19 November 1954.
20. K.C.S. Paniker, Catalogue of the eleventh annual exhibition of The Progressive Painter's Association, Madras, November, 1954.
21. Some informants hold the view that in 1957 Dhanapal first introduced the large head in his sculpture as seen in his terracotta sculpture (later, bronze copies of it was made) *Mother and Child* and also in later works, *Avayyar* and *Christ*, and Paniker's inspiration derived from it. Considering their close association at this point of time by all probability it was realised simultaneously in their works.
22. Personal letter of the art critic Ludwig Goldscheider to Paniker dated 6 September 1960.
23. Ref. fn. no. 18.
24. *Artrends*, nol. 1, no. 2, January 1962.
25. It is pointed out that C. Rajagopalachari raising the issue to Paniker of artist's crisis of having to live and work in poor conditions, which became the trigger point in starting to think in the direction of bringing together art and craft and the artist's co-operative. "The story goes that Paniker became convinced about the success of the craft concept when a French artist Jeanne Pierre visited the School, wearing a shirt with mother of pearl button that he had designed himself". Mukund Padmanabhan, 'Making a Splash', *Indian Express*, 17 April 1996.
26. French decorative art exhibition in Madras in 1964, which was organized by Jeannine Auboyer, is also said to be an inspiration. She was also the first one to make a monetary contribution to Cholamandal, which was then forming.
27. *Times of India*, Bombay, 6 February 1970.
28. R. Venkataraman, the minister for industries inaugurated the export venture and T.A.S. Balakrishnan Director of Industries and Commerce in that occasion said that 'crafts, when touched by art had great export potential'. *Indian Express*, Madras, 11 January.
29. *Matrubhumi* (Malayālam) daily, 18 September 1966.
30. *The Hindu*, Madras, 6 February 1970.
31. 'Artist-Craftsmen of Cholamandal', *The Times of India*, 20 February 1971.
32. The deliberately placed question mark indicates doubt about the possibilities of art and its given language options, and artistic choices as effective socio-political practices.
33. Apart from Rajagopalachari, the Governor of Madras Presidency bought paintings for the Raj Bhavan at many occasions, and also donated money for its various activities, for instance he gave Rs. 1000 (some artists report the amount to be Rs. 2000) for a show in Delhi and other activities as early as in 1947. As instance of the Governor's (friendly?) interference, one may quote an instance. Commenting on the painting by Paniker *Blessed are the Peace Makers*, the Congress Governor C. Rajagopalachari in a personal correspondence wrote thus: "I liked the exhibition yesterday, I congratulate you and thank you very much. The big picture is a great piece." Referring to the figures below the figure of Gandhi, he further adds, "I wish you could clothe the private parts of the nude figures with some rags. . . . It would be more

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satisfactory and not lose its lesson." He stops the letter by suggesting an alternate title, *oṁ Śānti, Śānti, Śānti.* (Letter dated 4 Janurary 1956.)

34. One may remember that the radical left oriented Malayālī political and cultural activist, M. Govindan whose association with Periyar, the arch rebel against north and anything Āryan and Annadurai's political thought of Draviḍa resurgence had very little influence on the art scene. Govindan was a great polemist, and he use to organize talks, meetings and discussions in the Madras Museum premises, and brought artists and poets together. Although certain artists like M.V. Devan considered Govindan as a mentor, largely the artist community followed the apparent apolitical position of Paniker, which implied seeking of freedom, and acceptance of the support of the ruling Congress government.

35. Although one may be able to see the influence of the Draviḍa ideology of the DMK in the works some artists of the time, its artistic strategies can largely be seen more operative in the public/popular art in Tamil Nadu since then. (Ref. M.S.S. Pandian, *The Image Trap/M.G. Ramachandran in Film and Politics*, Sage, New Delhi, 1997, and 'Politics, Popular Icons, and Urban Space in Tamil Nadu', A. Srivathsan, in Twentieth-Century Indian Sculpture, *Marg*, (ed. Shivaji K. Panikkar) vol. 52 no. 1. September 2000.

36. In an essay titled, 'A Lost Treasure: The Cultural Metropolis of the South Loses out to Trivandrum' (*Aside*, July, 1970), reports about Paniker's offer in a newspaper to donate his vast collection of his works to any state gallery that was willing to house it as a unified display. To quote, so as to bring in the popular Malayālī's response, "Cultural insensitivity, however, was not the sole reason why no steps were taken by the state to keep the collection in Madras. . . . Since Paniker was a Malayalee (though he had lived all his life in Tamil Nadu) it was easy to rouse parochial passions against him, and use that to denigrate the artist. With that kind of prejudice, it was easy to overlook that it was Paniker who inspired the art movement which later became renowned as the Madras Movement, and created the internationally reputed artist's village, Cholamandal. . . ."

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5

# Rethinking Gender Issues in Indian Art

*Parul Dave Mukherji*

This paper is an attempt to give serious consideration to gender issues in Indian art and that at the same time draws attention to the need for criticality in addressing these issues. In the context of new Art History which welcomes any serious consideration of gender as a critical component in analysis, it is important to be alert to the theoretical implications of abstracting gender from other relations of power. It seems appropriate to bring into sharp focus a recent work *Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art* edited by Vidya Dehejia, particularly her article in the book titled "Issues of Spectatorship and Representation."[1] While gender issues have been acknowledged in modern Indian art owing to the presence of women artists since the 1970s, their recognition in the traditional or pre-colonial context is quite recent and crucial for rethinking the disciplinary framework of Indian Art History.

Before proceeding further, it is important to be aware of the editor's location both disciplinary and geographical. Most of the contributors teach Art History in the west specifically in the US and seem to engage with the recent debates on gender within the discipline. Dehejia appears to draw from and at the same time differ strongly from certain concepts within the feminist Art History in the west. My critique of Dehejia's project is located within my interest in the problem of visuality in early Indian art and its relationship with the interpretation of the *Śilpa Śāstra*s or the technical treatises of art.

## Representation and Spectatorship in Feminist Art History

One of the important critical insights made available by western feminist Art History is the interrelatedness of the twin issues of spectatorship and representation and this has had a radical implications for the basic assumptions of conventional Art History. Representation in the visual arts is often connected with resemblance and to the wider question of imitation. In fact, the term representation literally contains another term "present" and thus assumes the presence of something as well as the presence of someone by whom and to whom representation is made.

It is precisely at this point that the question of representation opens itself to that of spectatorship. This means that representation never occurs in a neutral space but necessarily materializes as a

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mode of power. As a cultural formation of reality deeply embedded in social relations, representations make available forms of subjectivity, i.e., it acts to regulate and define the subjects it addresses and positions them as by class, caste, gender and religion.

Working within the critical frame facilitated by the notions of spectatorship and representation drawn from western feminist Art History, Dehejia points out their limitations as explanatory models in the context of traditional Indian art.

Some of the central concerns are identified by Dehejia as follows: (1) conflation of woman and nature in Indian art and its relation with women's status in society; (2) the relevance of western feminist theories which centre on the male gaze to the study of Indian art; (3) the question of women's agency in their representation; (4) women as art patrons and (5) representation of women in textual sources as images and artists.

1. As far as the equation between women and nature is concerned, Dehejia points out that it is as much the feature of western art as Indian art. Women as an extension of nature is a familiar trope whereby feminine fertility and motherhood are invoked in art. However, in the case of early Indian art, an important difference has to registered in comparison with western art.

   > However, far from being a demeaning equation, as has been argued in the western context, the affiliation of women in nature and fertility has positive connotations.[2]

   It is further noted that in India where fertility meant much more and was associated with prosperity and auspiciousness, the image of a woman stood for positive signification. Hence, it is therefore not surprising that early monuments, religious or secular were abundantly covered with feminine images.

2. This is where comparison with representation of women in western art is invoked and lines of distinction drawn via the notion of the male gaze. Much of feminist work in the west has critically assessed the way in which the female body in European art is objectified and become subject to the male gaze.[3] In the politics of visual representation since the Renaissance, it is observed that women are constructed as embodiments of the male desire in, as for example, the genre of nude paintings.

   However, the problematic of the male gaze, though extremely productive in western art, may be inappropriate in early Indian art, especially in religious art. No Indian counterpart existed in a society where images of women when found within a place of worship resonated with positive connotations. Examples are drawn from the *yakṣī* sculptures found around the Buddhist *stūpa* in Bharhut and projected as positive engenderment. Her argument runs as follows:

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> Images of women in early India did not suffer from the Judo-Christian bias that coloured their representation in the west. Far from being seen as the embodiment of sin or evil or objectified for the benefit of the male gaze, these *Yakṣi* figurines were associated with auspiciousness and good fortune.[4]

3. The remaining two issues intertwine as well, i.e., the question of agency in women's representation and that of the female patronage. The most productive area explored by Dehejia is that of patronage in early Buddhist art at Bharhut *stūpa* which brings to light the startling fact that it was not an exclusive male domain. In her recent study of donative inscriptions, she has found names of women patrons.[5]

   The problem is that Dehejia sees a direct relationship between patronage by women and their agency. Art produced under women patrons need not be any different from that patronized by men. In the art of Italian Renaissance, recent research has unearthed documentation surrounding monuments donated by women but that is in no way taken as an index of resistance to patriarchy or operating outside the space of patriarchy.[6] In economic terms, it would imply that women of particular class, community and religion have greater access to funds and thereby decision-making power in terms of scale of the monument or the place where it would be erected. It may have direct implications for their status in society but in terms of power of visual representation and control of meaning, woman patronized art may not significantly differ from the standard modes of representation.

4. Images of women is another thematic explored by Dehejia in the Sanskrit sources, literary and technical treatises to demonstrate the positive engenderment of women. Citations from these sources are brought in to show how images of women on temple walls were sanctioned by tradition as marks of auspiciousness.

   > As a house without a wife, as frolic without a woman, so without (the figure of a woman) the monument will be of inferior quality and bear no fruit. — tenth-century Orissan text, the *Śilpaprakāśa*.[7]

   The fact is that there is not a dearth of such information on images of women in Sanskrit sources and on the contrary they are constantly invoked to connote secondary signification. It is rather difficult to accept Dehejia's reading of these references as indicative of higher status of women in art and society. If at all, it projects women as carriers of meaning of perfect domesticity, male pleasure and perfect building and such a representation may in fact underline their subordinate status. Here, the nature-woman equation works more to contain women as objects of representation conforming to the patriarchal expectation of perfection in domesticity, sex and architecture.

   In the politics of representation signification requires those who have the power to construct

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meaning (subject of representation) and those provide the material of representation (objects of representation). It is hardly surprising that these two roles of signification are structured along the gender lines.[8] Women's bodies are the material signs on which meanings are inscribed. Hence to draw a direct parallel between abundance of images of women on secular or sacred monuments and their social empowerment implies overlooking the political strategies in representation.

5. In fact, far more meaningful is her search for literary sources for establishing the existence of women artists. Women as artists is far more empowering role to explore and through it the known texts can be made to yield different meaning. The literary references drawn by her focus on a woman artist specialising in portraiture, for example:

> One ancient tale speaks of the great skill of a woman painter (*śilpinī*) who served also as her king's emissary to prince Sudarśana to whom she carried a portrait of princess Mandaravati. When the prince remonstrated that the princess could not be as beautiful as the picture, the *śilpinī* immediately painted his likeness so convincingly that Sudarsana was reassured that Mandaravati's portrait too must be true to life.[9]

What is of particular interest in this context is the proficiency of Mandaravati in drawing convincing portraits which seems to be her claim to fame. Dehejia puts this citation to the most curious use where she culls out the name of the woman artist and discredits Mandaravati's ability to paint likeness. In fact, Dehejia feels compelled to add a footnote to the above statement.

> The fact that Indian portraits do not aim at a verisimilitude is irrelevant in this context.[10]

Dehejia seems to be dissociating the issue of representation from the agency of representation. She is so keen to deploy this reference to prove the point about the existence of woman artist that she completely overlooks the much larger question of visuality in the politics of representation. By visuality, I understand the relationship between the visual representation and what it refers to in the visible world to be not an absolute one but necessarily culture-specific. By committing herself to the view that verisimilitude has no place in Indian art she aligns herself with the orientalist/colonial legacy which disallowed verisimilitude in Indian art on assumption that it was an exclusively western phenomenon.

I am not suggesting that such a literary reference is to be treated as a historical evidence for establishing realistic portraiture. It is here that the gender issues and the politics of representation interconnect and there is a possibility of a productive alliance between a feminist and post-structuralist Art History. Representation has always been at the heart of critical debate. From being a purely epistemological and philosophical issue, representation has increasingly been figured as political from the post-structuralist perspective. To accept verisimilitude as a western domain would imply

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succumbing to colonial eurocentrism and duplicating the transcendentalist discourse framed by, say, E.B. Havell and A.K. Coomaraswamy. The latter had its own historical validity in the strategic defence of traditional Indian art against the colonial representations.

Post-structuralist interventions in Art History by Norman Bryson, for example, have adequately problematized the question of visual representation. Rather than using the positivist terms like verisimilitude, Bryson foregrounds representation as ideological strategy in signification and deploys the term "effects of the real."[11] In such a context, questions of representation have emerged as central to a process of disciplinary rethinking. Dehejia's use of gender issues situated within spectatorship alongside the acceptance of the conventional notion of verisimilitude seems anomalous.

If on one hand, Dehejia readily acknowledges the importance of cultural specificity arguing that the gender issues in Indian art cannot be adequately addressed through a critical frame derived from western feminist Art History. On the other hand, when it comes to the crucial question of visuality, she accepts verisimilitude as exclusive to art in the west. The very truth claim of the literary source within its narrativity is put to question much in the manner in which Stella Kramrisch comments in her Foreword to Sivaramamurti's *The Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara* on the reality claims of such a text.

> If as the text shows and Dr Sivaramamurti stresses, realism was a main consideration with the painters, their criteria of verisimilitude were, no doubt, met in practice, although no object painted in the murals of Ajanta, which are roughly contemporary with the *Chitrasutra* would strike a spectator today as being realistically painted. The realism is in the eye of the beholder and pious stories told, though not in the *Chitrasutra*. . . .[12]

In Kramrisch's comment, there is a subtle shift from the transcendentalist to the Orientalist claim that Indian mind is a timeless site of deep contradiction between what it thinks, what it imagines and how it acts.

Criticality in addressing gender issues must go hand in hand with a critical reassessment of art historiography. It is here that the concept of visuality can be productively deployed to bring together the gender issues and that of the politics of visual representation. As in the case of Mandaravati, the question of gender is intricately complicit with visuality and agency of women's representation in this context hinges as much on the gender of the artist (woman artist) as on her proficiency in representing the visible world (sitter) plausibly.

It seems clear from her article that the main agenda is that of recovery of the history of women as art patrons and artists or as "positive subject-matter" in art and grant them due recognition not allowed by dominant Art History. This framework informed by gender issues has enormous potential of approaching both Indian art and the textual sources from a different point of entry. A serious

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problem arises when Dehejia begins to subscribe to reflectionism that both the existing images of women on the religious monuments and the representation of women in textual sources reflect the actual status of women in society. It will be simplistic to assume that the abundance of images of women standing for fertility and auspiciousness implied their higher social status. A more relevant question to be asked is who had the agency to represent women thus and the fact that at times women patronised art in no way should suggest that images constructed will fundamentally depart from the accepted norms of visual culture.

However, it is her commitment to the project of recuperation that she seems to treat gender as an abstract category and fails to ground it within the politics of representation. The more serious problem with her framework is the compulsion to circumvent the issue of patriarchy in ancient India. Dehejia runs into problem confronting the standard text of and on patriarchy — *Laws of Manu* — *Manusmṛti*, it is argued, did not wield influence in its own time but was exalted as a canonical text by the colonial administrators for assisting them in governing their colonial subjects better. In its own time, its sphere of influence was restricted to the upper castes of elite Brahmins. The relegation of *Manusmṛti* to insignificance also goes hand in hand with the ambivalence towards the entire textual tradition on the same ground that the gap between theory and practice was too wide.[13] Drawing a line of demarcation between art practice and art theory, she argues that the textual sources belong to the realm of the ideal whereas the surviving sculptures constitute the actual reality. This dichotomy results in a peculiar reflectionism that while texts always written by an elite minority of Brahmins and do not capture the experience of the majority, the works of art visually accessible to all are the authentic terrains for inquiry into feminist concerns.

Besides, the resort to colonial conspiracy can be limiting as it turns the colonial archive, once a realm of truth, into a realm of pure untruth. Such a position can be extremely counterproductive as it loses sight of the fact that the archive is a collection neither of truths and untruths as pointed out by Aijaz Ahmed but "simply a vast historical resource for helping us understand our own past." And we need to

> approach that archive now with the same kind of skepticism, respect and scholarly care, subjecting it to that same objective scrutiny, that we shall reserve, . . . say, for, . . . the Puranic sources.[14]

I am certainly not implying that the comparative mode be abandoned but when it ensues in valorization of one's own culture *vis-à-vis* the western one that such a framework turns counterproductive. In fact, it is the repression of the system of patriarchy in Dehejia's analysis that has led to a naive celebration of the cultural difference. The cultural difference in the Indian art perhaps can be analyzed better if the historical specificity of the Indian patriarchy is acknowledged.

Here, I want to focus on two art manuals from culturally disparate sources, which deal with the representation of the human body. One is an excerpt from writings of a sixteenth century Italian

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artist and writer, Cennino Cennini in a chapter titled "The Proportions which a Perfectly Formed Man's Body Should Possess."

> Take note that, before going any further, I will give you the exact proportions of a man. Those of a woman I will disregard, for she does not have any set proportion.
>
> . . . A man has one breast rib less than a woman. . . . The handsome man must be swarthy, and the woman fair, etc. I will not tell you about the irrational animals, because you will never discover any system of proportion in them. Copy them and draw them as much as you can from nature, and you will achieve a good style in this respect.[17]

Here the opposition between nature and culture is staged across the bodies of women and men with the assumption that the latter display inherent laws and consistency of proportions whereas the former inhabits the space outside the realm of rules (hence to be domesticated). In the words of Edward Said, the opposition repeats the terms of "conflictual economy," contrasting the vision of domination (demand for identity, stasis) with change, difference — the temporality of history.

Compare this with another excerpt from a sixth century art manual or *Śilpa Śāstra*, the *Citrasūtra* which has one of its chapters on the representation of body in art.

> O Best of Men, know that just as men are understood to be of 5 types (*Haṁsa, Bhadra, Mālavya, Rucaka* and *Śaśaka*), there are 5 types of women corresponding to them. When standing next to the man, a woman should be made, as tall as the man's shoulder. When she is by herself, she may be made as one sees fit.
>
> A woman's waist is to be made 2 *aṅgulas* less than that of man. Likewise, the hips exceed that of a man by 4 *aṅgulas*. O King, the breasts should be made proportionate to the torso.[18]

Notice that each of the five human body types are of different height and proportion and correspond to the social/religious hierarchy between the gods and humans on one hand and again between humans on the other. While the tallest body type or the *Hamsa* is reserved for the gods, ministers, astrologers and Brahmins, the shortest one or the *Śaśaka* is prescribed for the Śūdras. And the intermediate types, the *Mālavya* and the *Rucaka* are for representing women and the Vaiśya or the trader class. Within women, the women of good family (*kulastriya*) and courtesan are to be shown in the *Mālavya* and *Rucaka* mode respectively.

While in the art treatise by Cennino Cennini, the female body central to the Italian Renaissance visual tradition as the object of representation is placed outside the realm of the normal body. It demonstrates the inversion of the terms of representation in the visual and the textual tradition. Certainly, the comparison is not made with the view of valorizing the Indian representation of the

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body in art over the Italian. In both the cases, the patriarchal frameworks are firmly in place and representations of the human body are of the male regarded as the standard and normal. In the Indian context, even if there is some space offered to the representation of the woman's body, it is only derivative of the male model. Besides, gender and caste mutually inflect each other to the extent that it is impossible to isolate one from the other. Occasionally when the female body does receive attention, it is placed around the margins and referred to as fragments or parts as opposed to the wholeness of the male body.

What this comparison between two diverse art traditions serves to demonstrate is that there is no universal patriarchal framework within which to address the gender issues in art. The relations of power are complex relationships structured by different cultural formation constituted by relations across gender, class, caste and religion; none of these terms exist in isolation but necessarily mapped as highly complex palimpsests of power relations.

Finally, if the positive engenderment informs Dehejia's framework for interrogating gender issues, it assumes finality of a foregone conclusion. As a consequence, patriarchy in the traditional society features as a phenomenon to be explained away and its corollary is an inadvertent romanticization of ones past and women's roles imbricated in it.

> As twentieth century viewers, inundated with exploitative female imagery, we perhaps tend to overlook the ambience, and the relative 'state of innocence' prior to the mechanical reproduction of visual images.[19]

Mapped on to the divide between the western and Indian art traditions is another binary set-up between the pure past of the pre-industrialised native society inhabited by women unrestrained by patriarchy and the corrupt present of the modern world of capitalistic exploitation from which none can escape. In today's era of globalization, it is all the more incumbent on Feminism to be sensitive to cultural differences and be critical of any form of essentialization. The foregrounding of cultural specificity forms a crucial component in addressing gender issues in Indian art as succinctly pointed out by Dehejia. However, it is equally imperative to resist polarization set up between the western versus the Indian representation solely along the gender lines. Such a framework tends to homogenize western feminism on one hand and more importantly its essentialist underpinnings runs the risk of feeding into nativist celebration of one's past.

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# Part II
# Patronage in Question

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6

# Technique, Time and Form in Ancient Indian Terracotta Sculptures

*Baishali Ghosh*

In this paper I want to trace some of the ways in which technique plays an influential role in determining or detecting the manifestation of terracotta images, with particular references of Sātavāhana and Kuṣāṇa period. But the genesis of this paper goes back to contradiction between form and technique, cited by Stella Kramrisch in her article "Indian Terracotta,"[1] which is still considered as basic value judgement of the history of Indian terracotta art. My attempt, here will be to describe how the changes in representation of terracotta sculpture assume their real significance as a part of wider process of changing taste, technique and time, as well as patron, practice and purpose.

## Enigma between Form and Technique

Terracotta, literally, means "baked clay." In other words, an image in clay is called "terracotta" when it is fired. Another technical aspect about the terracotta is that the image has to be intact after baking as it was before firing. Till now, we refuse to accept a broken terracotta image; normally we consider that as "defective." Thus, "acceptance" of a terracotta image, becomes attached to its outcome of "firing." Almost similar practice can be expected about 3000 or 2500 years back, when terracotta was one of the dominant media of plastic activity in India.

The history of more than 2000 years of Indian terracotta sculptures is evaluated by Stella Kramrisch on the premise of two main groups — "ageless" (*Pls.* 18 & 19) and "timed variation" (*Pls.* 20 & 21). The "ageless" continues essentially changeless, thus is problematic for dating. The "timed variation" results from the impresses which the passing years leave on them. It is generally attempted to mark those terracotta as "ageless" where some knotty problems remain regarding the dating of terracotta. On the other hand, terracotta that noticeably follow the progressive course in the different period of history are termed as "timed variation." This "timed variation" is identified on the basis of different aspects like subject-matter, political period, region, datable data or excavated strata.

Supporting C.C. Dasgupta's view, Kramrisch writes that the chronology of Indian terracotta has given rise to too much of speculation and several conclusions have been drawn from the existence of

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various types. She makes this division to avoid much speculation and assumption. After that, it is accepted as a founding and most fruitful framework to avoid the danger of miscategorization in any kind of study or display of terracotta.

Kramrisch goes on that the two types occur side by side on various levels of different excavations. Even today, Kramrisch's categorisation into the two types persists — the "ageless" considered as "primitive," and the "timed variation" registering the impress of temporality in terms of attributes of style and local adoptions. Hence, the former is considered less attractive and impressive, which in fact, is neither less in number nor in importance to the people who make or use them. Their changing appearance is the work of man or nature. There is no considerable difference between "ageless" types of figures of human or animal by suggestion, whether they are to be worshipped or played with. The function of the timeless is not itself determined. It becomes "ageless" by the establishment of the relation with the person who uses it. The meanings of these images themselves do not change. From a child to a grown up person, the same form of "ageless" type is real, to each according to his or her power of understanding.

Once again, according to Kramrisch "ageless" terracotta are not affected by any particular time or period. The forms of this kind of sculptures do not change but seem to be born out of the substratum memory — in subconscious mind that passes from one artist to another, from one century to the next. Simultaneously she mentions that the figure carries an "ageless" and traditional meaning, which does not need any alteration of shape to be properly understood and used by generations.[2]

I support Kramrisch's identification of "changeless shape" or form of terracotta sculptures and flexibility of the concept and aspect in expressing "motive." But her assumption that this "ageless" type bears an "ageless" meaning is not convincing and applicable always. Some "ageless" practices in both rural and urban areas are associated with terracotta, seem to be remained same through the ages. For an example, worshipping terracotta snake god (*manasa*) or offering votive terracotta figurines in the river or under the tree is still widely practised by both village and urban people. It apparently shows that the shapes do not change, but performances and purposes shift at subtle levels and these changes appear beyond understanding until and unless one goes through the actual acts of the ritual. Furthermore, a playing terracotta figurines of today which look like pre-historic figurines shows an "ageless identity," cannot convey the same or similar meaning or identity to a child of today. Therefore, the explanation and expression of the "ageless" terracotta not only move away from person to person as Kramrisch points out,[3] but also transform according to the age of its user. In other words, "ageless" type as designated by Kramrisch does not carry an "ageless" meaning or concept. It is at the level of function and its ritualistic context that a change of meaning may occur.

Kramrisch gives an example to explain the relation between "ageless" and "timed variation". I quote

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> if analogy of these two types of artifacts is sought within more impressive range of 'works' in stone, the changing spectacle of the temples and their images range on one side, the innumerable [ammonites] on the other. The recorded kinds of *lingas* have not undergone any essential change: today as ever the emblem of *Siva* is understood in its implications, and it depends on the extent to which the devotee is qualified to realize some, or all of them. The same is true about the *salagrama* stone, emblem of *Visnu*.[4]

Here, it is significant to mention that, though an emblem of Viṣṇu or a form of *śivaliṅga* has an "ageless" concept and identity, but none of these can be comparable to the notion of "form of "ageless" terracotta." I have already discussed that meaning of an "ageless" form can be altered from period to period, which is not applicable for an emblem of Viṣṇu (*śālagrāma śilā*) or *śivaliṅga*. Sometimes the mark of the passing generation can be observed on what Kramrisch classifies as the "ageless" type. She has also noticed this aspect, but did not want to put them under her definition of "timed variation". According to her, multiple uses of the "ageless" type in different localities create a distinct identity, but cannot be considered as time bound variation. Besides, this type does not offer sufficient basis for dating it.

Sometimes, similar forms of terracotta from different periods[5] may not be dated stylistically, but one can get an approximate date by thermoluminen science test.[6] At the same time, "ageless" kind can also be marked through its formal aspect. As Haku Shah observed, when Saraladevi, an old woman from Goalpara, a village of Assam had made the "earth mother", identical in proportion and details to those, excavated from Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Kalibangan. But as soon as she had placed the "earth mother" upon a bicycle, Saraladevi brought it back to twentieth century !

So, it can be said that "ageless" and "timed variation" are not two distinct groups or two types of terracotta, but different aspects of terracotta sculptures which stand one after another and one above another on the same form of the sculptures. Thus it is seen that the "timed variation" becomes "ageless" through the changes of time. As sculpture with bird beak nose, eyes like circular beads reminds us of the Indus Valley terracotta. Along with Saraladevi today, there are so many people who make this kind of image with or without recognizable elements like Saraladevi's bicycle.

Almond and Bridget Allchin perhaps rightly observed "with these Harappan terracottas we notice for the first time a general tendency which is repeated several times in later Indian art."[7] Saraladevi's sculpture displays this "general tendency" too. Therefore, this "general tendency" is present in everyone irrespective of time and it inspires and influences the image-makers to create a simple form by smooth and subtle pressure of the finger. And this is the very basic and primary form of human being or animal which is visualised and imagined by everyone more or less in similar way and that flows down silently from one age to another.[8] It is this basic form that is understood as "ageless" by Kramrisch. But, it is not a distinct type or category. It is also present underneath of

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"time bound" variation. In other way, an "ageless" form becomes "timed variation", when impression of particular period is legibly visible on it.

Enigma starts, when Kramrisch said "timeless type are made by hand; no moulds intervene between clay and maker. Moulds are used as rule for the timed variation."[9] Supporting Kramrisch view, Mulk Raj Anand states "the main distinction seems to be based on the fact that apart from the similarities, the "ageless" are made by hand and time bound have involved the mould."[10] Kramrisch's division of the technique of terracotta-making itself conflicts with her categorization of "ageless" and "timed variation". She identified the bodies of some Mauryan terracotta figurines as "ageless", because those are hand modelled, and the faces of those figurines, as "timed variation", as those are made from the mould.[11] If we follow the categorisation of technique as done by Kramrisch, a great deal of confusion arises. For example, the body of terracotta figurine from the Mauryan period reflects a distinct Mauryan style, though it is hand modelled; the latter forms the basis for Kramrisch's classification as the "ageless" type. On the other hand, the moulded face of the figurine of the same period retains an "ageless" quality and is continued in the subsequent periods. Even many hand modelled Kuṣāṇa terracotta represents the time bound characteristic of Kuṣāṇa age.

**Confusion Around Kaolin**

As we have seen that Kramrisch's formalistic analysis for the history of Indian terracotta sculptures fails to take into account the technique of terracotta making. She ignores the role of method and materials of a medium in the manifestation of terracotta images. According to her evaluation, the Sātavāhana terracotta (*ca* first century BC — first century AD) is a time bound variety.

The terracotta of this period are round like free standing sculptures and hollowed from inside because of the use of the double mould. A thin layer of clay is pressed onto the different moulds, one for the front and another for the back. Then both parts are joined by a fine seam of soft clay, that is often visible. Sometimes, these sculptures have holes on the different places of the body. Dhavalikar finds,

> this technique was highly specialised and does not appear to have been elsewhere in the country. It does not seem to have been evolved locally, but is supposed to have been imported from Roman Empire where it was in vogue.[12]

Here, it is mandatory to mention that the use of double mould was neither first time in India nor was it an imported technique. Its use for the first time in India can be traced back to eighth century BC.[13] Besides this, the application of double mould was quite prominent and profuse in Mauryan period. Furthermore, the technique of double mould was also adopted in the Śuṅga period of northern India, contemporary to the Sātavāhana dynasty.[14]

The Deccan is largely composed of either dense black clay or red laterite soil, both of which are difficult to cultivate and sculpt with. The image-makers of this region preferred either red clay or

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extremely fine composition of white clay or ball clay. But it is identified by several scholars that besides earthenware, kaolin was used for terracotta.[15] Dhavalikar explained that kaolin is a much finer material and the Sātavāhana terracotta, therefore does reflect the skill of the artist who fashioned them for plasticity and durability. It is a much more superior clay than any other clay. In this connection, a mention can be made here that kaolin is not a plastic clay at all. It is a primary clay, used in porcelain and for glazing pottery and cannot be used alone. The proper use of kaolin was unknown to Indian potter until the Muslim entry that introduced the use of kaolin along with porcelain-making and pot-glazing.[16] In contrast, the ball clay that looks very much like kaolin, is a secondary clay. It has an excessive shrinkage quality during firing as a result of its high plasticity. Sculpture in this clay has to be small, since its high shrinkage does not let the figure to be big in size. Simultaneously, the figure needs to have some passages or holes to pass heat and inflated air uniformly, so that the figure does not shrink abruptly during firing since sudden shrinkage breaks or cracks the figures. Moreover, the applique technique for the ornamentation with white clay is also quite risky because of its tremendous plastic quality. Thus, we find that terracotta in ball clay from Sātavāhana period are small and the detailed ornamentation are done from the mould itself, which is distinct from contemporary north Indian terracotta sculptures, made of earthenware. The artist put holes in the places of eyeballs, mouth, ears in order to hide unpleasant appearance.

However, beside the huge number of red (earthen) clay terracotta, the selection of this ball clay encourages us to probe the circumstances and causes of using inconvenient material. As it has been cited before that regional black clay or red laterite was not suitable for fashioning the form and earthenware was, perhaps not much available always. Furthermore, these images, made of white clay, have apparent similarities with the sculptures, made of the composition of the kaolin, from other geographical regions notably Roman ones.[17] It is very much possible that contemporary trade connection[18] developed a taste and demand for the terracottas like those of Romans that look precious and are attractive for its shiny effect which regional white clay partially could create. Most probably these terracotta sculptures are the result of private patronage. The contemporary time and the centres of such kind terracottas are pointed out for extraordinary progress in trade and prosperity of commerce as business or political or religion centres. Here, it is necessary to note that as works of N.B.P. (Northern Black Polishware) ceased to be used in the Gangetic Valley by 200 BC, but it continued in the peripheral region as late as AD 50.[19] Besides the Śuṅga-Kaṇva kingdoms of Gangetic Valley region, the contemporary Sātavāhana in southern India can be marked as the most powerful and flourishing dynasty after 200 BC. Amaravati, Kondapur, Nasik, Nevasa, etc., are places where a number of N.B.P. pottery are excavated. It is interesting to note that these places were also significantly known as terracotta-making centres. The use of N.B.P. pottery indicates a strong possibility of a group or class who could afford the valuable and precious pottery, made of N.B.P. ware.[20] It also suggests that there was sufficient patronage to sustain the production of such rare pottery. So, it can be speculated that there were also people who desired to have the images in that effect of kaolin

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which clay-like ball was able to produce. Devangana Desai referred to one of the earliest inscription from a cave of Nāsik, which records that money was deposited in a potter guild for the benefit of Buddhist monastery.[21]

**'Crude' and 'Coarse' Craftsmanship: Stereotype Evaluation**

A century before and after the beginning of the Christian era, there were several invasions in the North India — including and in addition to the Kuṣāṇa, the Śakas and the Parthians. But the succession of the Kuṣāṇas created a different map in the political as well as cultural and commercial history of India. It brought material prosperity increasing the trade links with the west especially Rome and the Hellenistic world. This period witnessed the gradual assimilation of new coming foreign culture and cult, motifs and function into the cultural pattern on northern India.

Against the progression of cultural activity and commercial prosperity, the evaluation of the terracotta sculptures of this period was opposite; S.K. Srivastava remarks that as against stone sculptures, the terracotta met a reversal or decline.[22] Desai writes,

> the appearance of a large number of crude and coarse terracotta during the Kuṣāṇa period poses a problem to the social historians of art, as this was a period of great prosperity. The Kuṣāṇa rulers issued numerous gold and copper coins, and even the indigenous dynasties used copper coins.[23]

R.S. Sharma mentions,

> in no other period had penetrated so deeply into the life of common people. . . . Urbanisation was at its peak during this period and most of the excavated Kuṣāṇa sites have revealed large brick structures with baked tile roofs and floors.[24]

Other scholars also pointed out the deterioration of Kuṣāṇa terracotta.[25] These opinions stem from the crude and coarse surface of the terracottas and rough handling of the clay. So, it is urgent to probe the background of "crudity" and "coarseness" of Kuṣāṇa terracotta.

Artists of this period continued the similar method of previous period, but in case of selecting materials and processing of the materials they seem to find out different ways of making terracotta which is identified as the setback of the technique. Srivastava mentioned that the bad quality clay was used for Kuṣāṇa terracotta because the surface of the most Kuṣāṇa figurines is neither soft nor smooth.[26] V.S. Agrawala explains that the tender impression created by the figurines of the earlier period vanishes and the effect is crudeness and roughness.[27] Quite often, the clay of Kuṣāṇa sculptures is marked with micaceous ingredients. To overcome this drawback, the modellers mixed rice-husk profusely to make the clay porous, by levigation and to protect it from gases when put to fire. Though by mixing rice-husk and other tempering materials, some levigation was achieved, its effect was worse as firing created air holes and made the surface rough by burning the husk.[28] In this

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connection, first it is important to point out that the characteristic of "crudity" and "coarseness" of the sculptural surface does not signify any deterioration of the development. At the same time, it is not meant that in any case "crudity" and "coarseness" unaccompanied by the sculpture will indicate a great antiquity. Secondly, here it is mandatory to examine the possible causes of "crudity" and "rough" surface of the sculpture, which results from adding husk, grit or other tempering materials. Technically, mixture of rice-husk or other tempering materials with the clay allows the sculpture to be bigger in size. Most of all, during baking, these materials are burnt out leaving the sculptures lighter in weight. The use of the grained husk or grit in different degrees creates varied textural surfaces of the sculptural body. Kuṣāṇa terracotta's instantly displayed that the concentration and attention of the artist goes in depiction of distinct expression and portraiture or particular facial features of the figurines. So, the different surface quality seems to be intentionally produced by the artist in order to give the feeling of individual skin and flesh of figurines. Besides these, technically, the addition of tempering materials help the artist to build up hollow sculptures without keeping any air holes and using moulds. Therefore, it may be assumed that the use of tempering materials was a deliberate decision and selection of the Kuṣāṇa artists.

Another remarkable aspect of Kuṣāṇa sculptures in terracotta is the impression of the tool marks on the sculptural body which are ample but not unintentional. Artists explored and utilised several methods and materials — hand-modelling, applique technique, tool-marks and the use of the moulds for introducing certain characteristics of the sculpture. Therefore, it is not an appropriate evaluation that

> there is no significant improvement or changes in the quality of clay in the majority of the Kuṣāṇa terracotta figurines. The standard is much deteriorated and no way it can stand in comparison with the clay of Mauryan and Śuṅga images. A general setback in art and technique can, however be noticed. A close study of these figurines reveals that the modellers of the Kuṣāṇa age did not take interest in processing and treating the clay properly and refinement of the clay, characterising the Mauryan and Śuṅga had become bygone days.[29]

Here, it is necessary to point out that terracotta with smooth surface are from Kuṣāṇa period are not rare. For instances, the male figure from Candraketugarh,[30] the standing female from Sirkap and Charsadda,[31] the male head with turban from Kausambi,[32] the Kāmadeva from Mathura, etc. In fact, the experimentation of the technique by the Kuṣāṇa artists, shows the result in the subsequent period, Gupta dynasty, through the manifestation of huge and hollow sculptures like "Gaṅgā" and "Yamunā" from Ahicchatra (U.P.), dated fifth century AD. These sculptures, almost 175.5 cm in height, were baked in a cylindrical pits of 10 and 12 ft deep which is not the achievement of a day, but an outcome of long experiments and experiences of the previous periods.

Terracotta of Kuṣāṇa period, themselves give us a glimpse of astonishing virtuosity of terracotta

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modellers, who especially worked in clay, enjoyed a great freedom and expressiveness. Such modellers are referred in an early Buddhist text not later than the third century AD as modeller in clay (*puṣṭakāras*), as distinct from potters (*kumbhakāra*) or brick masons (*iṣṭaka vardhin*).[33] Such reference has encourages us to assume that the modellers in clay of Kuṣāṇa period perhaps started getting a distinct identity, whereas earlier they were mentioned as *kumbhakāra* or potter. It also suggests that the division of professionals who worked in clay most probably remained the same before the Kuṣāṇa age. Simultaneously it raises a question that if the terracotta of the Kuṣāṇa time was beyond public interest and demand and in declining stage, was there any need of distinct identity — as "modellers in clay" ?

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century AD throughout central and southern India indicate the extend of trade. Wheeler draws a distribution of map pinpointed sited of Roman coin and explained, "The map emphasis a fresh remarkable extant of the contact of south India with the western world during Roman principal implying a full use of the south monsoon. It would appear that Roman trade found the smaller south Indian Kingdoms more amenable or accessible than large and powerful Andhra (Sātavāhana) kingdom of the center, although the latter, with its abundant mineral sources, might have taken part in the business and indirect cultural contracts with the Mediterranean world are discovered there from time to time" ('Arika Medhu : An Indo Roman Trading Station on the East Coast by India., Ancient India', *BASI*, 2,1946 , p.116.); Chandra , M., *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India*, New Delhi ,1977, pp. 97-102.

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    Fig no. 57; The refined and polished surface of this figurine may recall the Bulandibagh terracottas of Mauryan period. C C Dasgupta describes it as "a mixture of Indian religious motif and Hellenistic plasticity", *Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture*, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 193-95.
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7

# The Socio-Economics of Art in the *Śilpa Śāstras*

*Vaijayanti Shete*

This paper attempts to foreground the various socio-economic relationships between the artisans, the architects and the craftsmen and the royal/religious patrons of art in ancient India. While many studies in the past have focused on the iconography and stylistic analysis of early Indian art, no comprehensive discussion of the various economic distribution systems and networks binding artists among themselves and with their patrons in a complex hierarchy has been undertaken. Being a Sanskritist, my entry into the discipline of Art History has been via the *Śilpa* texts which offer a mine of information about the monetary aspect of art production.

Salary and salary regulation are central to any economy and form one of the most influential factors in the production of art. Of course, payment policy differs from place to place in accordance with local needs and circumstances; the same may be applied to the collective work done by the artists. Hence in this paper, an attempt is to present an organized account of a variety of aspects pertaining to monetary matters, with the aid of not only references in *Śilpa* texts but also literary sources. Corollary to the question of economic transaction is that of the allocation of residential premises of the various castes in a town and the changing status of artist/artisans in society.

The *Śilpa* texts are a source of rich information on economic rules and regulations observed traditionally. The sages seem actively engaged with the social and pragmatic aspects of various economic subjects, including the whole issue of payment to all classes and creeds, traders and officials, etc. To shed light on the social regulations for the various artists, *Śilpa* texts like *Mayamatam* dated eighth century AD, *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, dated eleventh century AD, attributed the King Bhoja from Malwa, as well as the other treatise known as *Aparājitapṛcchā* ascribed to Bhuvandevācārya dated twelfth century AD, etc., are relied upon concerning the monetary issue of transactions between artists and patrons and among artists.

The voluminous work *Aparājitapṛcchā* is very vocal regarding the city planning. The very text points out an active role of the patrons as well as artist. It even states the location of the dwelling place for the artisans and craftsmen of different categories, in relation with that of the king and rulers, ministers, Brahmanas, etc. The text refers to goldsmiths, perfumers, ivory-workers, garland-makers, metal workers, weavers, leather workers and *sthapati* or *sūtradhāra* in relation with the

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existing social hierarchies between the castes. This issue becomes all the more crucial as an index of the social status of the artisans in society.[1]

In the *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, instructions about the allotment of the dwelling places and specific locations of their houses are certainly noticeable.[2] The *Mayamatam*, a south Indian text on art, architecture, sculpture, draws attention to the houses for other classes. Amidst the description of the houses for potters, barbers, fishermen, oil makers and so on, the dwelling of *sthapati* is recommended at a distance from the village, to the south-east or to the north-east of it.[3] By the time of medieval period, artists are turned into outcasts. And thus it explains why the *Śūdras* are settled on the periphery of the village, a little further away from other classes.[4]

Regarding professions based on manual skill, ample information is preserved in Sanskrit literature. Since ages, a number of arts and crafts are known in the society. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*,[5] an early text, highlights the respectable positions enjoyed by the artisans and craftsman. *Rāmāyaṇa* is more explicit in the spheres of artistic professions.

It mentions, *karmāntikas* (assistant), *vardhaki* (carpenter), *khanakan*s (miner), *śilpakāra*s (artisans), *śilpin*s (artist), *naṭa*s (actors), *nartaka*s (dancers), *śāstravid*s (experts in *śāstra*s), etc., are invited in the court and greatly honoured by the King.[6] Similarly in seventh century AD, Prabhakaravardhana[7] extends his welcome to artists and craftsmen from all over the country to participate in royal commission before the marriage of princess Rajyasri. Bana refers to how *sthapati*s and others are garlanded by the king. Dhanapala has a passage in *Tilakamañjarī*, which speaks of respect shown to the artists.[8] Thus quite a good number of supportive statements may be cited to focus on an artists' special seat and place in the royal court. It seems art does not appear only at court shows and festivals but it was also a profession. Expertise in any technique or art is the mainstay in the artists' life; it is this that allows the earning of his livelihood. Not only that, but the status of the professional artists in the early medieval period of Indian history appears to have been very high and honourable. Artist's/artisan's exceptional ability is appreciated by the royal class. Rajashekhara provides substantial evidence in the *Kāvyamīmāṁsā* about the place reserved for the artists in the assembly.[9]

By the time of *Kuṭṭanīmata*, in the late sixth century AD, status of the artisans slowly descended from its very high pedestal. By the time of Kshemendra, matter comes to such a stage that we find open ridicule of the artisans and the author ranks them with inferior horse riders and mahouts.[10]

At this juncture, on one hand, the individual artists suffered degradation but as far as the workmanship was concerned, it continued to be highly valued. As it was proclaimed in the *Śilparatna*, *kāreṣu śilpavatam*, manual labour associated with the four kinds of workmen beginning with *sthapati* was to be valued.[11]

At this stage one should keep in mind, that the building process involves co-ordinated activity. Building activity reaches a high level of experimentation and innovation in the medieval period. *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, as for example, throws light on the highly decorative and developed activity

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so far temple construction and house planning, etc., are concerned. At that time, a number of artists put their efforts whole-heartedly and uniformly for a long time under the leadership of the *sthapati*. The *Manusmṛti* emerges as the most important authority on the social position of the artisans. It mentions very favourably the status enjoyed by a *śilpin* or *kāruka* in the construction of a'monument, whether it may be a *śilpin* or a *kāruka* carrying out his role, day by day for a king.[12]

There is a growing perception that artists' group comprises of four types of technicians or *śilpins* who work on a building.[13] Traditionally, there is a watertight division of the builders, i.e., *sthapati, sūtragrāhin, vardhaki* and *takṣaka*. The texts assigned different designations. Even inscriptions refer to various names of the artists.[14] *Kāśyapaśilpa* divides into *śilpajña, daivajña, vidhijña* and *paura*. While *Bhṛgu-Saṁhitā* refers to them as *sūtradhāra, ganitajña, purajña* and *kāru*, *Mayamatam* differentiates them into *sthapati, sūtragrāhin, takṣaka* and *vardhaki*. Sometimes the words like *nṛkara, karmakāra, karmī*, etc., also occur in the texts.[15] These terms denote labourers[16] or servants. They are expected to be clever, clean, sympathetic (kind), helpful and healthy. Always cheerful and efficient, they are expected to perform well. Besides, they must show respect to their superiors to be considered worthy of respect.

The first is the *sthapati* (usually translated as architect). He is aware of all the science. He is an expert in painting, clay modelling; he knows differences in soil conditions as well meteorological effects on the entire construction.

He is most reliable, despite of hatred, and jealousy; on the other hand, he is enthusiastic, *Mayamatam* eulogized his moral qualities and his perfect technical skill. This very text further underlines the importance of his function.[17] He is the master of the work who is responsible for the building until its inauguration and completion. So also in the religious rites, is the *sthapati* involved which punctuated the construction as well as the ceremony, which accompanied the extraction of stone. *Sthapati* is only second to the *ācārya* when the rites are in progress. However, the *sthapati* is equally efficient to handle any job.

At the command of the *sthāpaka* or *ācārya*, *sthapati* climbs to the summit of the temple, or on the top of the temple a first time when he has to set in place the crowning bricks.[18] According to *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, the *sthapati* is either a Brahmin or a kṣatriya who is well versed in *Vāstuśāstra*. The *sthapati* is expected to be thorough in practical/technical knowledge on one hand. On the other hand, he is supposed to be well aware of science of *vāstu* in detail.[19] Sometimes, the *sthapati* is called a *sūtradhāra* in other texts like *Bhṛgu-Saṁhitā, Kāśyapaśilpa* and *Aparājitapṛcchā*.

The *Bhṛgu-Saṁhitā* narrates the qualities of a *sūtradhāra*[20] as follows — a *sūtradhāra* is well mannered, a *kalpaka* (genius) who knows all the principles of *Śilpa Śāstra*. He knows appropriate use of the instruments as mentioned in the *Śilpa Śāstras*. He also is aware of putting into practice the norms laid down by the *Śāstra*. The *Kāśyapaśilpa* refers to these qualities in a different mode,[21] i.e., truthful experienced, generous and compassionate. Neither craving for wealth, or woman, he should be immensely well-versed in the tactics of his work; he is trained in painting and allied subjects. While

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he must be conversant with the *Śilpa Śāstra* and familiar with the technique of using *sūtra*, he must even understand the credit and debit money matter. Actually, one can call them traditional engineers. *Aparājitapṛcchā*[22] mentions distinguished traits of a *sūtradhāra*. The second one is *sūtragrāhin*, the one who is intelligent, repudiate and expert in one science or technique. Perhaps he is a son of *sthapati* or a disciple of *sthapati*. *Mayamatam*[23] elucidates that the *sūtragrāhin* is responsible for the operation of measuring and laying out the plan. He may be compared with a modern foreman, who takes the charge of a *sthapati* in his absence.

It is remarkable that in the case of architect's death, it is his son or a student who must complete the work satisfactorily.[24] His helper is called *daivajña* or *ganitajña*. *Daivajña* calculates the overall expenditure for the building activity. Similarly, he predicts the tenure for finishing the work and also calculates how long the building will last. He suggests the material for construction. As is known for the *takṣaka*, he is one who knows all the *karma*s and finishes work according to the order of a *sthapati*. He is skilled in using a *sūtra* (binocular), a *daṇḍa* (the stick, a staff used for measuring the land), also knows the length, width, height especially of the material. He is expected to prepare required shapes of a stone, wood, a brick pieces as per the measurement, following the suggestions of a *sūtragrāhin*. In modern technology he can be called a sub-overseer. Stella Kramrisch, however, has translated the term *takṣaka* simply as a carpenter implying just a craftsman.[25] Occasionally, he is known as *vidhijña* since he knows the method of devising the material. In other words, he ought to be aware of the construction of the earlier building, the after effects of that process, and the next step to improve the building activity. In short, preparing the essential material for a building and keeping an eye on the expenditure is a job of *takṣaka*, *vidhijña* and *purāṇajña*.

We come across the fourth artist usually mentioned as *vardhaki*[26] — he is both a mason and a carpenter. He seems to play an active role in the consecration ceremony. He is a fitter, in a nutshell. He knows the perfect technique of making the clay, *cūnam*, etc. He even repairs the instruments. He is expert in joining the building material, which is received from a *takṣaka* and thus erects the building. Briefly it may be stated that *sthapati* is the chief among all and is honoured by the *sūtragrāhin* and his assistants.[27]

The four-fold division of the artists/artisans is devised in such a way and placed in a hierarchy that it ensured a smooth co-ordination of the different functions. In fact, the *sthapati* is mainly responsible for the completion while *sūtragrāhin* works under the *sthapati* insofar as he is trained by the *sthapati*. While the *takṣaka* is subordinated to both *sthapati* and *sūtragrāhin*, the *vardhaki* is under the supervision of only *sūtragrāhin*. The *karmī* is under the control of the *sthapati*. It is possible to give contract to *takṣaka* and *vardhaki*; hence they are working under a *sūtragrāhin* to provide the good quality material and its ample usage as per the need. The *takṣaka* and *karmī* are subordinated to *sthapati*.

Finally it may be said, without these helping hands, the work undertaken cannot get completed.[28]

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On the hand, the *Aparājitapṛcchā* employs a different set of designations for those in charge of temple construction. Instead of mentioning the above-said terminology, the compendium refers to them as *ācārya, sūtradhāra* and *yajamāna* as the three main authorities in the building construction.[29] This *Śilpa* text proclaims *ācārya* as Brahmā himself, while the *śilpī* as Janārdana and *yajamāna* is Śakra[30] and it is this trinity of gods that is meant to function in the edification of secular or religious structures. As the *Aparājitapṛcchā* informs, the *sūtradhāra* enjoys the position of a ruler or lord.[31] The *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra* is rather complex when it asserts that the *sthapati* is the sole authority in planning and the setting up of the civil, royal or religious structures. This voluminous and renowned work does not accept the division of work passed down traditionally. It rejects separate class of workers, i.e., the *takṣaka*, the *sūtragrāhin* and the *vardhaki*. While the text maintains that the *sthapati* must know all the Śāstric rules and techniques, it also stresses on the knowledge of their practical applicability. Unless and until the *sthapati*'s Śāstric knowledge is applied to the actual construction and handling of the material, such a knowledge remains futile. By this time, largest *prāsāda*s were erected. In the building constructions, thousands of men, masons, labourers, artisans, artists worked as a corporate body. In fact, the *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra* expects the *sthapati* to be trained in *aṣṭāṅga*.[32]

It is remarkable to find out that the *Śilpa* texts are not insulated from the economic set-up sustaining the construction of the temple. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* is a pointer to the property relations and so on. On the other hand, it is stated that 10 per cent of total expenditure is reserved for supervising the work. From this income, half of the money goes to the chief craftsman. One fourth is to be shared among the subordinate officials. While the third part of the half share is distributed among the third rank persons and, to the last category, one-fourth part is to be offered.[33] The *Kāśyapa-Saṁhitā* makes the division like 40, 30, 20, 10 per cent of the total expenditure. It is emphasized that this kind of distribution is not only followed among the artists but preferred everywhere in a contract-basis or in corporate activity.[34] According to this method, the *sthapati* demands 48, the *sūtragrāhin* 24 per cent, while 16 and 12 per cent share go to the *takṣaka* and the *vardhaki* respectively. In Kauṭilya's time, a different practice prevailed. A labourer was paid according to rate of finished work; he is fixed in the beginning of the entire work.[35] It is also stated that the *śilpajña* is to be honoured (i.e., granted) with land; to *daivajña*, gold is offered and to *pauras*, clothes are given.

*Mayamatam* mentions how important it is to honour all the four artisans along with the *sthapati*.[36] The king is obliged to offer land and cows to the tetrad who are led by the architect and to those expert workmen,[37] silver, gold house, various utensils, etc. *Aparājitapṛcchā* reflects on the *sūtradhāra*'s share which includes village, qualitative and fertile land, cows, buffalos, horses, domestic things, comfortable seat, servants, etc.[38] *Aparājitapṛcchā* mentions *guruyāja*, which is a noteworthy feature. The priest receives *deśa, grāma, pura, nagara, kūṭa* and other items of daily use including wealth and corn. The text also refers to *ṭaṅkapaṇika*s, working with chisel.[39] The *karmakāras karmāntika*s, the salaried labourers on daily wages, are to be always satisfied with a bare necessity of nourishment.

*Bhṛtya*s are provided with nourishment items or sometimes money. *Śilparatna* incorporates the

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practice of daily payment in the form of not cash but kind, e.g., the text suggests that usually to the *takṣaka*, etc., *prastha* of *vrīhi* or *śāli* (paddy) is given daily. Double this paddy is offered to a *sthapati*, while *guru* also shares double that of the *sthapati*.[40]

In the case of wood's price, the length of it from its middle is counted and the outer layer is discounted. The wood is measured by the hand and multiplied by the traditional counting practice, so the total results to sum divided by one fourth *pāda*. Accordingly price is fixed, i.e., the *catuṣka* of that is preferred as well as *cayamāna* measure is taken into account.[41]

While in the case of a saw, which is cut from a log of wood, the payment so said to be *prastha śāli*. Saw is measured separately — its length in the middle from front and from back is measured. Half the *aṅgula*s of total length is multiplied according to *āyāmakāra* measurement; dividing twelve from the multiplication number. That is the number, which is remembered (*krakacha*) tenth part is a share of *sthapati*, while remaining share is to be accepted for cutting the tree and for moulding and shaping the wood by a *takṣaka*.[42] While counting the payment, wood's hardness or softness, is also taken into account and accordingly the payment is increases or decreases. In this method 10 per cent or 8 per cent is shared by the *sthapati*.

Similarly in the case of stones, the measurement is, *catuṣka* for cutting the stone, *prastha* of *vrīhi* is the payment[43] for shaping the stone, cutting it and making it soft, all the efforts are counted. So doubling the number, the *cayamāna* is also considered. Stone carvers are paid double the price of wood carvers.

Image-makers are also paid in *paṇa*s, according to the image. The image is made out of stone or wood. The height in *aṅgula*s is preferred for its value. For painters, half *paṇa*s are given than to sculptors. Expert working on *vitāna* (ceiling) or a board are paid five *paṇa*s.[44]

For the goldsmith, payment is one-tenth of the *arka* (extract),[45] for constructing a *bhusa* (crucible), more or less will be preferred. For melting, heating and hammering on iron, the same rule is followed, to the metal workers in copper, bronze, lead, iron, black iron, 10 per cent of that particular liquid is a payment, so also text recommends that these workers are to be offered domestic items — foodstuffs, cloths, etc., for the family livelihood[46] or be given double payment.

Thus, products whose prices are superseded include essential elementary needs such as basic foodstuffs, standard articles of clothing, and raw materials. This is apparent in the *Rāmāyaṇa* also. The poet presents a very luxurious and artistic layout of Rāvaṇa's palace in which there are references to imposing seats and carpets, costly utensils, artificial birds, and animals, all possessing exquisite fineness being fashioned by the workmen with superb digilence. The *Rāmāyaṇa* also refers to the corporate activity taking place. It may be observed that corporate activity in economic life had become the marked feature at an early period. Corporate activity had become so patent a fact that it was carried on through the principle of partnership. Thus, it may be observed that the *Śilpa* texts

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also mentioned about monetary settlement based on partnership among the artists group and it was followed by a mutual understanding.

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   १ पुरे पुरे च विप्राश्च क्षत्रिया वैश्यशुद्रकाः ।
   तद् वाहय स्तथा चान्या स्तथा स्थपति संकुलः ।।

   २ विप्रक्षत्रिय वैश्यानां प्राकारा वै निवासिनाम् ।
   वणिक् कर्मकराणां च मध्यागं च सुखावहाः ।।

   ३ पूर्व याम्योतरे शस्तं हट्टमार्गादि चत्वरम् ।
   ईशाने शिल्पिनः सर्व रजकाश्छिंपकाः परम् ।।

   ४. चर्मकाराश्च वरूटा आग्ने च दिशमाश्रिताः ।
   नैर्ऋत्ये शोणिऽका ज्ञेया वायव्ये तन्तुवायकाः ।।

2. Ed. B.J. Sandesara, *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, Gaekwad Oriental Series No. 25, Baroda 1966, 10-88 H.

   १ विभागश्च प्रमाणं च लक्षणं चादिमस्य यत् । जातिवर्णाधिवासश्च यथावत् तदिहोच्यते ।।
   सुवर्णकारानाग्नेय्या तथा वटन्युजीविनः । निवेशयेत् कर्मकरान्यानपि विधानावित् ।।

   २ ९३ — कर्मस्वाधिकृता ये च ये चापि परिकार्मणः । शौणिऽका ये च तान् सर्वात् वायोदिशि निवेशयेत् ।।

   १०२ — नगरस्य वहिनः प्राच्यां लिंगस्थान् विनिवेशयेत् । श्मशानानि तथा तत्स्थात् याम्यायां स्थपतिः सुधी ।।

3. Ed. Bruno Dagens, *Mayanatam*, vol. I, Kalamulasastra Series, 14, Delhi, 1994.

4. *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra, op. cit.*, 7.16.

   ते शुद्रजानयो जाता नातिधर्मरताश्चये ।
   कणरम्भोपजिविणं शिल्पिता पशुपोषणम् ।।

5. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, IV.5.4., ASS No. 42, Pune 1901.

   नमस्तक्षभ्यो रथकारेभ्यश्च वो नमो नमः कुलीलभ्यः कमरिभ्यश्च वो नमः ।

6. Ed. R.T. Vyas, *Rāmāyaṇa*, I XIII, Oriental Institute, Vadodara 1992.

   1 ततोऽब्रवीदिव्दजातवृद्धान् यज्ञकर्मसु तिष्ठितान् ।
   स्थापत्ये तिष्ठितानां चैष वृध्दात् परमधार्मिकान् ।।

   2 कर्मन्तिकान् शिल्पकारान् वर्धकीत् खनकानपि ।
   गणकात् शिल्पिनश्चैव तथैव नटनर्तकाम् ।।

   3 तथा शुचित् शास्त्रविदः पुरूषान् सुवहुश्रुतान् ।
   औपकार्या क्रियन्तां च राज्ञां वहुगुणान्विताः ।।

   4 ब्राह्मणा वसायाश्चैव कर्तव्याः शतशः शुकाः ।
   न चावज्ञा प्रयोक्तव्या कामक्रोध वशांदपि ।।

   5 यज्ञकर्मसु ये व्यग्राः पुरूषाः शिल्पिनस्तया ।
   तेषामपि विशेषएण पूजा कार्या यथाक्रमम् ।।
   कारिताः सर्व ऐवते शास्त्रज्ञैर्यज्ञ कोविदैः ।।

7. Bāṇa, *Harṣacarita*, p.142, Ananta Shayana Granthavali No. 187, 1880.
   सित कुसुम विलेपन वसन्तसतकृतैः सूत्रधारै रादियमान विवाहवेदी सूत्रपातम् ।।

8. *Tilakamañjarī*, p.54, Shrivijay Lavanya Surishvara Jnanamandir, Botad. Saurashtra, 1954.
   क्वचित् दर्शनयथावतीर्णेषु शीर्णदेवायतनेषु कर्मारम्भाय


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सपदि संपादित पूजासत्कारात् व्यापार्यतः।।

9. Vide Rājaśekhara, *Kāvyamīmāṁsā*, Gaekwad Oriental Series, Chapter X.
पूर्वेण प्राकृता कवयः ततः परं नटनर्तन गायन वागजीवनकुशीलव तालवचरा अन्येऽपि तया विधाः। पश्चिमेन अपभ्रंशिनः कवयः
ततः परं चित्रलेप्य कृतो माणिक्य वन्धका त्रैकटिकाः स्वर्णकार लोहकारा अन्येऽपि तयाविधाः।।

10. C. Shivaramamurti, *Ksemendra — Kalavilas, op.cit., Ancient Artists, Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, 1936.
नीचस्तुरगारोद्य हस्तिपक्कः खलतेराऽथवा।
द्याग्छित सकल जनानां तासामपि वल्लभो भवति शिल्पि।।

11. Ed. T. Ganapati Shastri, *Śilparatna*, Trivendram Sanskrit Series No. LXXV, p.1; Trivendram, 1922, p. 5.I.41
तस्मादेष सदा पूण्यः स्थपतयादिचतुष्टयः।

12. *Manu-Smṛti*, Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay, 1928, VII.138.
कारूकाग्छिल्पिनश्चैव शूद्राश्चात्मो व जीवीतः।
एकैकं कारयेत्कर्म मासि मासि महीपती।।

13. *Mayamatam*, 5.13.
शिल्पकाभिज्ञकुशला आचार्यश्चेति शिल्पिनः।।
स्थपति सूत्रग्राही च तक्षको वर्धकिस्तया।।
भवंति शिल्पिनो लोके प्रख्याताः स्वस्व कर्मभिः।।
Also vide Stella Kramrisch, *Hindu Temple*, p.I, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1976.

14. R.N. Misra, *Artist in Ancient India*. Vide *rūpaka, śailavardhaki, karapātrika, puṣṭakarma kārakas, lepaka, vijñānin, śilpi, varṇik*, etc.

15. Various *Śilpa* texts provide different groups of artists and designate artists differently.

16. *Mayamatam, op.cit.*, Adhyāya 5.
कर्मिणो निपुणाः शुद्धाः वलवंतो दयापराः।
गुरूभक्ताः सदा द्रष्टाः स्थपतयाज्ञानुगाः सदा।।

17. *Mayamatam, op. cit.*
स्थपतिः स्थापयेत स्थिरम्।

18. *Ibid.*, 18-190.
विमानं पुनरासहय स्थपतिः स्थापकाज्ञया।

19. *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra, op. cit.*, 44.2.
शास्त्रं कर्म तथा प्रज्ञा शीलं च कियान्वितम्।
लक्ष्यलक्षण युक्तार्थ शास्त्र निष्ठो नरा भवेत्।।
For detail on *sthapati* vide author's article in *Humanities*, vol. 41-42, Journal of M.S. University, 1992-93, pp. 113.

20. *Bhṛgu-ṛaṁhitā*, Adhyāya 2.
सुशीलश्चतुरो दक्षः शिल्पशास्त्रस्य तत्वविद्।
सूत्राणां धारेण ज्ञाता सूत्रधारः स उच्येत।।

21. *Kāśyapaśilpa*, The Kashi Sanskrit Series No. 154, 1953.
ब्रह्मज्ञः सत्यसंधः परधन तरूणीनिः स्पृहः कर्ममर्मः। ज्ञाता दातार्तपाता गणितवपु कलाशिल्पवित्सूत्रधारः।।

22. *Aparājitapṛcchā, op.cit.*, 50.2-24.

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सूत्रधारो महाप्राज्ञः पटकर्मसु निरन्तरम्।
माधुर्यवांस्तयालैय वास्तुविधादि कौशलः।
ज्ञानचक्षुः सुहृदयः प्रारम्भादिरूजवहः।।
हस्त लाघव सम्पन्तो धाय्यचित्रादि कौशलः।
चक्षुः प्रत्यक्ष कृच्चैव हयदृष्टं ज्योतिषो यथा।।

23. *Mayamatam*, Adhyāya 5.

सुनामा हढबुद्धीश्च वास्तुविधाव्यिपारगः।
स्थपते स्तस्य शिष्यॉ वा सूत्रग्रहिभेवत्सुतः।।

24. *Mayamatam, op. cit.*, 18.160.

तैतैव तिष्ठितं कर्म श्रीसौभाग्यायुरे धतम्।
तस्याभावे तु तत्पुत्रः शिष्यो वा तं गुरू वरे।।

25. *Mayamatam, op.cit.*, 15.4.16.

स्थपत्या ज्ञानुसारी च सर्वकर्म विशारदः।
सूत्रदंड प्रपातज्ञो मानोन्मान प्रमाणविद्।।
शैलदार्विष्टकादीनां सूत्रग्रहि वशातु यः।
तक्षणात्स्थुल सूक्ष्माणां तक्षकः स च कीर्तीतः।।

26. *Mayamatam, op.cit.*

मृत्कर्मज्ञो गुणी शक्तः सर्वकर्म स्वतंत्रकः।
तक्षकात्तक्षणेनाप्नि न्नुवप्युपरियुक्तितः।।
वृद्धिकृद्वर्धकीः प्रोतुः सूत्रग्राहयनुगः सदा।।

27. "स्थपतिः शास्त्रवित् प्राज्ञः सूत्रग्राहयादि सेवितः"

28. एतेषां तु स्थपत्यारव्यो विश्वकर्मेति संस्कृतः।।
एभिर्विना न किंचिच्च कर्म कर्तृ हि शवर्षत।।

29. *Aparājitapṛcchā, op.cit.*, 51.4.

आचार्यश्च सूत्रधारैश्च यजमानैश्च संयुतः।
त्रयश्च साधकैश्च कर्मकारादि संयुताः।।

30. *Ibid.*, 51.5.

आचार्यश्च स्वयं ब्रह्मा शिल्पीश्चैव जनार्दनः। यजमान्तु शकः स्यातः त्रिभिः कर्म प्रवर्तते।।

31. *Aparājitapṛcchā, op.cit.*, 61.6.

भूमेस्तले सूत्रधारो विश्वाधिपो द्वितीयक।
वेदवेदाङ्गसंभूतो हविष्याशी धिते? द्विजः।।

Also vide *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra op.cit.*, 45.

स्थापत्यमऽगै रिदमष्टभिर्यश्चतुर्विधं वेत्ति विशुध्धवुध्धिः।
स शिल्पिनां संसदि ल्व्धपूजः परो प्रतिष्ठा लभते ।।

32. Compare *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, 45.9.

अष्टांगमपि यो वेत्ति स राज्ञा स्थपतिर्भवेत् ।।

To illustrate *aṣṭāṅga* (1) *vāstupuṁsa vikalpana*, (2) *dvārakarma*, (3) *prāsāda*, (4) *dhvajochṛtiḥ*, (5) *nṛpatevesma*, (6) *gṛhabhāga*, (7) *yajamānasya śālāyam manamiritam*, and (8) *rājaśibiraniveśodurgakarama ca.*

33. *Bhṛgu-Saṁhitā* Adhyāya 2.

सर्वेषामधिनो मुख्या स्तदर्धे नापरे तया ।

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तृतीयेन तृतीर्योशश्चतुर्योशश्च वादितः ।।

34. *Manu-Smṛti*, Adhyāya 8.

संभूय स्वाति कर्माणि कुर्वभ्यिरिह मानवैः ।
अनेनैव प्रकारेण कर्तव्या भागकल्पना ।।

35. Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra*, 3.14.66.65.

कारू शिल्पि कुशल्पिः चिकित्सकः परिचारकः आदिः आज्ञाकारिकवर्गास्तु यदान्यस्तद्विधः कुर्याद् यथा वा कुशलाः तया नेतनं ल्थेवा साक्षित्रत्यर्थेमव स्याद्।

36. *Mayamatam, ibid.*

तस्मोदतत्सदा पूज्यं स्थपत्यादि चतुष्टयम् ।

37. *Ibid.*

दधान्नृप स्थपतिकादि चतुष्टेभ्र्या
मानादिकर्म निर्पुणभ्यः उडां च गां च ।
नित्यं यया जगति वित्तमेनकवस्तू न्याचन्द्रताारमधिवासभुवं मुद्रा सः ।।

38. *Aparājitapṛcchā, op.cit.*,151.5.6.

गृहोपस्करकं सर्व गोमहिष्यश्वकादिकम्।
दासीकर्मकरांश्चैव यत्सुखासनादिकम्।।
ग्रामं चैव ततो दधात् कृष्णां वा भूमिंउत्तमाम्।

39. *Ibid.*

अन्ये ये पूजनीया वै उत्तमाष्टंक पाणिकाः।
वस्त्रो त्रावरणैः सर्व उत्तमादि कमेण तु।
सर्वेषां टंकपाणीनां दावा दानं च पुण्यकृत्।।
सर्वेषां कर्मकरणां धनं दधात् च सर्वतः।
वस्त्र प्रावरणान् कृत्वा पुण्यदानं च सर्वथा।। Continue..
*Mayamatam, op.cit.*,18.204-206.

धान्यैश्च पशुभि र्वस्त्रैवाहनै र्भूमिदानकैः।
शेषानपि तक्षादिविष्टि सर्वात् स कर्माणि।
सन्तपर्यद्विख्यैच्च वस्त्रैर्वाऽपि मनोहरैः।।

40. *Śilparatna, op.cit.*, 43.1.2.

व्रीहीणां वाय शालिनां प्रस्थषट्कं यदेव सा।
प्रायेण तक्षकादीनां दृश्यते नित्यवेतना।।
एतद् द्विगुणितं दधात् स्थपतेः तद् द्विसऽगुणम्।
गुरोरिति महद् वाक्यं अस्ति शास्त्रेति शुश्रुमः।।

41. दारिता वेतना तस्या व्रीहिप्रस्यं न संशयः।।
दारणा द्विगुणं तक्ष्णे सुश्लक्ष्णो करेण पुनः।।

42. *Śilparatna, ibid.*

तद् दशांश स्थपतये दत्वा शेषं परिग्रहेत्।
वृक्षाणां छेदते तेषां दारेण तक्षणादिषु।।

43. *Ibid.*

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44. *Ibid.*

19. विम्बे तावत् पणः प्रोक्त स्तदर्ध वात्र चित्रके।
हस्तायाम वितानाढय फलकादौ विचक्षणैः।
पण पञ्चकमारव्याता वेतना चित्रलेखेन।।

45. 19 प्रायशः स्वर्णकारस्य वेतनार्क दशाशकम्।।
भूषादिकरेण किञ्चिन्न्यूनं वाप्यधिकं वकचित्।।
22 ऐतषां कर्मकर्तृणां तत्तदद्रव्य दशाशकः।

46. लोहदारू हपत्तन्तु मृतिकादि कृतामिह।
कुटुम्ब पोषण पूर्णा पूर्णा वा स्याद् द्विवेतना।।

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8

# Roda Temples: Edifice of Spiritualism or Political Advertisement?

*Jayaram Poduval*

The purpose of the paper is to understand the political significance of the introduction of *nāgara* type of architecture at Roda group of temples (Gujarat), and to put forward a hypothesis of possible involvement of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty in the development of temple architecture in this region. Before I lay out my argument, a brief elaboration contextualizing my concern.

It is apparent that entering the temple complex at Srirangam in Tamil Nadu is like travelling in a time machine. One travels from twentieth century represented by the lofty *gopuram*, to the main shrine which was built in the eleventh century. These transits of the spectator are aided by the structures representing the time of their construction. Each layer strategically conceals the other, and each layer is distinct from the other. The distinctness and identification of architecture as signs of authority is the dominant factor that was shared by the political power the world over. In India too, one could perceive this aspect especially in the medieval period. By enveloping the temple complex with a new layer, encompassing and obscuring the earlier layer/s the rulers proclaimed the take over of the temple. This seems to have been a common practice particularly in south India. As mentioned above, Raṅganātha Temple at Srirangam (Tamil Nadu) has a Coḷa (eleventh century) core; a Vijayanagara (sixteenth century) layer around it followed by the Nāyaka (eighteenth century) and the twentieth century enclosures. Similarly Aruṇācaleśvara Temple at Nandī (Karnataka) has two shrines built during Nolambas of Hemavatī (ninth century) completely concealed by the Vijayanagara *maṇḍapa*s. These structures stand substantiating their layered historical schema urging the investigator to inquire into the aspects of patronage; its political legitimacy through building and the power structures that the building manifested in material terms.

A. Ghosh mooted a viewpoint in 1970s denying the role of dynasty as the sole parameter for the study of Indian art and architecture. M.A. Dhaky has duly supported this proposition in his article in 1978 where he suggested the nomenclature of Mahā-Gurjara and Mahā-Maru for the architecture of Gujarat and Rajasthan respectively and Maru-Gurjara for the ensuing style, which he considers as the amalgamation of the two. Dhaky writes thus,

> In Post Gupta period, the regional idioms has begun to materialise, to develop, and to attain distinctness of expression. From this time on, we can be positive in

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> dissociating art and architecture from the dynastic denominations and think of, say, regional terms colligated ineradicably but abstractly with the time factor, the chronological axis.[1]

However, the refusal of dynastic affiliation would deny the history of art and architecture many possible vistas, especially in the case of medieval or pre-medieval periods when the political consciousness of style became more active. On the other hand, Dhaky does not believe that the creative minds of the architect had been bonded by dynastic compulsions. But freeing the architect from this bondage does not serve architecture history as the patron too had a major role in creating a work of art. However, it may not be imperative that every shift in art should be rationalised with alteration of the power centre. Kleinbauer spells out the function of art historian thus,

> Art historians aspire to analyze and interpret the visual arts by identifying their materials and techniques, makers, time and place of creation, and meaning or function — in short their place in the scheme of history.[2]

In the case of European art, this scheme of history was already coherent when the discipline of Art History was indoctrinated. In the case of India, particularly the pre-modern period, this comprehensibility seems wanting. The lack of historical evidence should not hinder the understanding of art; on the contrary, the art historian can contribute in structuring the historical scheme. On the relation between art and history few scholars suggest that,

> If historians these days are sensitised to psychological, demographic, climatic, or anthropological influences that they once neglected, they should be all the more prepared to accept the force of artistic traditions and worldviews.[3]

In the words of David Castriota,

> From the archaeological data that have accumulated over the last century, the appearance of political art would seem to coincide with the mature phase of early urbanism in Mesopotamia and Egypt during the third millennium BC. By this period, we encounter fully developed monumental architecture and closely associated works of painting and sculpture in the form of the temple and palace compounds, which housed and advertised the central religious and civic authorities, and this development was decidedly political in purpose and significance.[4]

**Roda Group of Temples**

The ambiguity, which engulfs a cluster of seven temples at Roda (*Pls.* 22 to 24), a site 8 km north of Himmatnagar (Gujarat), the monuments of our purview, begins to interest us from their historical and geographical placement itself. Though scholars like P.A. Inamdar,[5] U.P. Shah[6] and Dhaky place

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them around eighth century AD on the basis of the projections of the walls, and the expansion of ground plan, they are hesitant to attribute them to any specific dynastic patronage, a commendation of the source of building these monuments. The limitation and the resultant mystification arise due the lack of any form of related documentary evidence from the region. As the area had shifted hands from one power to the other in eighth and ninth centuries, it is dizzying to pin-point the patron of the temples of our concern. If one locates Roda temples to mid-eighth century, as do Dhaky and Shah, the credit of building the site should conform, either to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Manyakheda or the Pratihāras of Mandor, as these powers were active in the region. The dynastic affiliation should come either from south or north, as there are no evidence of any suzerain authority active in Gujarat at this time.

As apparent from the architectonic approach and design, Roda group of temples shows closeness to the Deccan region. Many architectural motifs and design elements travel from Deccan to western India. (It even appears that the Deccan gifted the *nāgara* type of architecture to Gujarat region. The proposition however has to be investigated further, which nevertheless is not attempted here.) The feature of the cushion capital on the doorjambs, which can be observed in Temple 3 at Roda, appear earlier in Ajanta (late fifth century AD), especially in the later caves, and in the Rāmeśvara cave and Cave 6 at Ellora (both can be datable to early sixth century AD). Did this motif that the Rāṣṭrakūṭa rulers were familiar with, travel with them in their occupation of Gujarat? Or, could it be that the architects who worked in Ellora migrated to Gujarat during the Rāṣṭrakūṭa occupation?

Temple 3 at Roda (*Pl.* 23) shares many features with Kāśī Viśveśvara temple at Pattadakkal (*Pl.* 25), Saṅgameśvara Temple at Mahākūṭa (both in Karnataka), Pārvatī Temple at Buchkala (Rajasthan) and Dharmanāth Temple at Dhamnar (Madhya Pradesh) (*Pl.* 26). These structures have been built in the time span between late seventh and early ninth century. The consanguinity of these structures is neither accidental nor part of the spirit of the age, since we have evidence to prove that the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty ruled over these areas during this period. However, these structures show no allegiance to Daśāvatāra cave and Kailāsa cave temples at Ellora or Navaliṅga temple at Kukkunur, which are authenticated as Rāṣṭrakūṭa edifices on the basis of inscriptions.

**Architecture as a Brand?**

Was the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty using the architecture style as political propaganda? Or, were they using the style of architecture as a brand, as the corporate sector does in the modern context? The concept of brand is the prime concept of advertising and distinctness invites attention and attraction, which is the watchword of advertisements. Here the temples built in various centres as west, central India and Deccan become the products of a single client, propagating the dominance of the power centre. The distinction of architectural style has been popular among the monarchs of Europe; thus the styles of architecture identified with their patrons as Roccoco with Louis XIV or the Manuelian architecture of Portugal or Victorian style of England. Here I am not using the styles as the historical

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phases but architecture as the brand of these rulers. Guy Julier observes the branding of few European cities.[7]

Raṣṭrakūṭas probably addressed the aspect of distinctness by contrasting construction designs. In Ellora where the caves were carved out horizontally, they have hewn out monolith structures using vertical carving. In Hampi they built a temple in sandstone just as contrast to the extant granite and schist structures. In Vasavi (Madhya Pradesh) they attempted to repeat the Ellora monolith, in Dhamnar (Madhya Pradesh) they carved the first *nāgara* monolith. The same approach seems to be in operation at Roda too.

The situation in Gujarat had drastically changed after the construction of Temple No. 3 at Roda. No *sthapati* was willing to return to the old Saindhava Maitraka style of masonic buildings because *lātina-nāgara* type of structure as Temple 3 have promised greater possibilities of vertical and horizontal expansion. It had just one *anuratha* in the form of the duly decorated engaged-column. Rānak Devī temple at Wadhwan (Gujarat) merely follows it while Muni Bawa temple at Than (Gujarat) introduces *anurathas* with figural decoration on them. At Kerakot and Kotai (Gujarat) the *maṇḍovara* becomes more vibrant with multifacets. The style that was established thus becomes the prototype from which the Solaṅkī structures of Gujarat as Sun Temple at Modhera take inspiration.

**Why Rāṣṭrakūṭas?**

Dantidurga, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler was a feudatory of the Cālukyas in the middle of the eighth century. Their existence in Gujarat can be traced right from AD 738 when Dantidurga joined hands with Vikramāditya II to resist the Arab invasion of Gujarat. Daśāvatāra cave inscription at Ellora suggest that Dantidurga captured Malwa and other countries which is further confirmed by the Sanjan plates of Amoghavarṣa which state that Dantidurga made Gurjara lords and other kings as door keepers (*pratihāras*) at the *hiraṇyagarbha* ceremony at Ujjain. The Rāṣṭrakūta inscriptions in Gujarat from Kavi (Bharuch district), Akota (Baroda district), Kapadvanj (Nadiad district) shows their active political participation in Gujarat.[8] More over there are clear indications of Rāṣṭrakūṭa architectural activity in Malwa, which is evident through the monuments at Vasavi and Dhamnar (both in Madhya Pradesh). Indragarh (Madhya Pradesh) inscription of AD 767 by Nanappā claims his lineage to the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.[9] Thus when the areas around Roda regions have evidences supporting the Rāṣṭrakūṭa activity; there is no need to write off the area of our concern to the Pratihāras.

If we accept the possibility of Rāṣṭrakūṭa hegemony over Gujarat, we may as well also look for Rāṣṭrakūṭa architecture in Gujarat. It will not be logical to argue that the Rāṣṭrakūṭas never built in Gujarat, as they have been the most voracious builders of the early medieval period. They try to support their hegemony with a monument whether it is in Ellora, Hampi or in Malwa as *medals*[10] of war or as suggested by Edith Porada and Castriota as "advertisements of political suzerainty."[11]

The issues unapprised however, are many like; what exactly is the Rāṣṭrakūṭa style of architecture

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and will the shrines at Roda fit into it? It will be difficult task for architecture historian to tackle these as there only few inscribed Rāṣṭrakūṭa monuments. As the Rāṣṭrakūṭa empire extended from Malwa (Madhya Pradesh) in the north to Tondainadu (Tamil Nadu) in the south they probably came into contact with already mature styles of Indian temple architecture, that is *nāgara*, *drāviḍa* and *vesara*. As many dynasties adhered to one of these and accepted the specific style as their characteristic, but Rāṣṭrakūṭas seem to have shuffled them and placed them in the contrasting ways in different regions.

The proclamation or advertisements of the political ascendancy in juxtaposition with erstwhile rulers seem to be expressed through two ways. One, the complete rejection of extant style and introducing a contrasting style, which would make the people forget the older style and their creators. Secondly, by appropriation[12] of the extant style and thus claiming political legitimacy. The selection of the path depends upon the process of the transfer of power and the definition of the relation between the present rulers and the erstwhile rulers. Rāṣṭrakūṭas probably followed both the methods. In Cālukyan regions or even in Ellora they followed the Cālukyan style with the technical collaboration of the Pallava carvers. In the regions away from these they followed the first method. The probable reason why the Solaṅkī rulers followed Roda style might have been to reclaim the political legitimacy of Cālukyas in Gujarat through Rāṣṭrakūṭas.

Apart from being a group of magnificent monuments, which has drastically changed the architecture pattern of western India, Roda group of temples appears as a statement made by the architect or the patron with a specific political agenda. Through the temples at Roda and elsewhere in India the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty seems to be advertising in the line of what Henry Adams stated about Normans, "We were a serious race. If you want other proof of it besides our record in war and in politics, you have only to look at our art."[13]

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10. Should be read with the connotation suggested by Francis Haskell, *History and its Images*, Yale University Press, London, 1995, p. 308.
11. A view put forward by Edith Porada in the article titled 'The Uses of Art to Convey Political Meaning in the Ancient Near East' and supported by David Castriota, in the Introductory chapter of the book titled '*Artistic Strategy and the Rhetoric of Power-Political Uses of Art from the Antiquity to the Present*', Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1986.
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9

# Methodological Crisis in the Studies of Indian Painting: The Case of the Mewar School

*Shailendra Kushwaha*

A bit of clarification towards citing complex issues related to the present status of research on the study of Indian painting may be pertinent right at the outset. Although one may be able to locate a positive shift in the scholarship on Indian painting in the recent past, the majority of book-length publications still are exhibition catalogues, and the works discussed and illustrated in these have inevitably been examples of particular subjects or styles chosen for their distinctiveness. The presently available scholarship is also more receptive in examining works that closely relate to other pictorial traditions in a given time and location, and the interest is not on the singularity of a school, but is in the interrelationships of schools. In the last fifty years there have been also a great deal of research done on widely scattered Indian painted manuscripts across the globe, illustrating diverse subject-matter, which certainly indicate the varied choices of patrons. However, the entire approach of this qualitative and value loaded assessment largely understate the creative inputs of the painter. Similarly the validity of quite arbitrary chronological sequences of styles, which anyway is the way in which Art History has been conventionally operating too is a major setback to begin research from any new perspective.

From Ananda Coomaraswamy's seminal book *Rajput Painting* (1923) to J.P. Losty's *The Art of Book in India* (1982) and from the writings of Karl Khandalawala to Ratan Parimoo, scholarship on the studies of Indian painting has indeed travelled a long journey, but on two distinct routes.[1] However, B.N. Goswamy is an art historian who began his search in a more conventional manner but soon deviated from the mainstream Art History.[2] He explored the much awaited research on the migrational theory to project the family lineage of painters as a basis for the study of painting in the Pahari region. Shridhar Andhare furthered this methodology in the context of studies of the genealogy of the Mewārī painters, although more or less based on the chronological development of this school of painting. For the first time he managed to scrutinise the original documents from the Mewar region but did not venture into the interpretative meaning of the pictorial representations.[3] This might have been due to the extensiveness of manuscripts available. In this process he also could

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not sustain the detailed study of each representative painting set and ultimately fell into the trap of the conventional art historical methodology on the lines of Karl Khandalawala.[4]

A critique of the scholarship on different aspects of different schools of Indian miniature painting as explored, analyzed and chronologically arranged, was undoubtedly a major task, which was encountered by the first generation stalwarts. This body of work produced by them remains absolutely important. In these, the work of art is brought to its descriptive domain, which has two aspects, the factual and expressive. Furthermore, these descriptions have two levels, of the images and of the forms, all these elements have to be understood in a coherent manner, then only the basic job of an art historian can be fulfilled so as to begin to search into other deeper levels of analysis. What was unintentionally ignored by conventional Art History, an interpretative approach which will enrich the discipline would be in decoding the hidden agenda of the painter within the constrictions imposed by various circumstantial forces in a given socio-political set-up. In many instances an artist's virtuosity can possibly be seen not overshadowed by the patron's intentions and the contemporary connoisseurship can be seen taking pride in appreciating the painter's merits.

**Mewar Painting and Painters**

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, painters in India were heirs to an unbroken tradition of great antiquity and extraordinary brilliance.[5] The libraries and treasuries of temples usually housed religious manuscripts of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain religions. These were often illustrated and decoratively embellished, and these preserved religious teachings for the use of devotees. With the appearance of paper and its greater flexibility of format, allowing the exploration of the potential and even the need for compositional innovation was increased. Changes, however, were achieved slowly. And for Muslim patronage, painting was a court art being created for a class conscious of its superiority; books became a prestigious emblem of wealth and power. The lack of substantial evidence makes it difficult to subscribe to the view that Hindu or Jain painters had earlier worked exclusively for a particular or a single patron; this may not have been economically feasible. The Muslim rulers founded *kitābkhānā*s (library workshops) within their palaces, and artist and artisans often worked exclusively for specific employers (*kitābkhānā* is depicted in the sixteenth-century manuscript of *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, *ca.* 1590-95, in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Geneva). Thus they painted to please a single person, rather than to reflect the general needs of a community, and this demanded sensitivity and responsiveness to a patron's individual and often highly idiosyncratic taste. The interplay of these differing attitudes in patronage continues throughout subsequent developments.

The sixteenth century manuscript painting in the Mewar region remains a matter of speculation, so far as the individual attribution of sets of paintings are concerned. Till the end of sixteenth century the individual credibility of Mewari painters is lost in anonymity under the collective consciousness of guild practices and under different patronage. The beginning of seventeenth century brought a remarkable change in the situation of the artist-patron relationship and painter's merit

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was recognized in manner that is spectacular. The result of this great admiration of the individual creative genius *(pratibhā)* is rewarding in many ways (*Pl.* 27 to 31).

The normalization of political relations of Mewar with the Mughals in the year AD 1614 under Rana Amar Singh after the death of Akbar, left open the way to cultural influences from the imperial court, especially as the heir-apparent Karan Singh's presence at the court was required by the emperor Jahangir. Yet Amar Singh and Karan Singh (AD 1620-28) were extremely selective in their cultural borrowings, more specifically their priorities in the field of miniature painting. The reign of Jagat Singh (AD 1628-52) marks the culmination of this phase of Mewar School of miniature painting. On the basis of historical evidence Jagat Singh had a very conducive diplomatic relationship with the Mughal Empire and established an atelier of painters (*citroṅ kā kārakhānā*) possibly under the supervision of Sahibdin because the majority of the painted manuscripts are in the style of this painter. It can be presumed on the basis of painter's attribution on the dated manuscript of *Cāvaṅd Rāgamāla* of AD 1605, (*Pl.* 27) painted by Nisardin that the hierarchy of apprenticeship was slowly emerging and the outcome was very encouraging. Therefore the possibility of Sahibdin's training as a painter under Nisardin at Chavand and Udaipur cannot be ruled out. The third major painter of Mewar is Manohar, (*Pls.* 28 & 29) who retained the legacy of Mewārī idiom in profound manner certainly indebted to Sahibdin but slowly drifted apart from Sahibdin (*Pl.* 30, 31). The result of this amalgamation was crystallized in his *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts of Jagat Singh's time (inscribed and dated) in the collection of Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, reflects Manohar's individual and fully formed style at its first appearance. Contrary to this, Sahibdin's work shows considerable advancement over the course of Jagat Singh's reign.

The artist-patron relationship was certainly influenced by the socio-political structure of the feudal system that emerged as a clannish organization of Rajput kings. Colonel Tod identified this system with the feudal system of medieval Europe. The socio-political milieu of Rajputs, especially the Mewari Ranas of this period was essentially based on the patriarchal system. A Rana chief rules over a state as the head of the clan, which was again divided into numerous sub-clans, headed by chiefs, generally members of his own family. The relation between them was not so much of a lord and the vassals but that of kinsmen commonly termed as *bhāījī*, *kākājī* or *chuṭ-bhāī*. These kinsmen claimed social equality in all the matters related to domestic and political affairs. Under the conventional practices the chieftains were obliged to pay tribute and homage, and also to perform certain services to their chiefs, nevertheless the fiefs in their possessions were their rightful shares, which they claimed as their hereditary right. It was due to the keen interest and personal pride of connoisseurship of the ruling Ranas of seventeenth century and the association of the wealthy Śreṣṭhī Jain community of Mewar that contributed in the patronization of the manuscript painting at various centres in the vicinity of Mewar, geographically surrounded by the prominent centres of prolific production of manuscript painting traditions at central and western India. In this process of cross-border interaction and the flow of well defined stylistic traits, which give us a perplexing

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amalgamation of the pre-Akbari stylistic traits. Certainly trade routes and contacts that encompass large number of towns became a dominant factor during medieval period and their role was crucial in the development of these centres.

During seventeenth century, Mewar had its own organized painter's workshop where the apprenticeship was striving at the excellence, which finally culminated in the typical Mewārī pictorial idiom. The documentation of the guild practices in a workshop was not properly recorded in the *hawāla bahīs* of seventeenth century. The general conditions prevailing in Mewar and the status of the painters (*citārā*) in a hierarchical socio-political milieu, offering well-knitted working conditions were surely conducive. After a close scrutiny on the basis of hypothetical inferences regarding the general conditions prevailing in the workshops (*kārkhānā*) and the status of the painters (*citārās*), one can reconstruct the entire hierarchical and disciplined workshop culture where the wages were paid on the basis of the merit and skills of the individual painters, certainly under the approval of the master painter and his recommendation to the *darogā* (in-charge of the financial matters of the workshop) who were held responsible for the payments.

The complex process of selecting a manuscript for pictorial representation solely depended on the patron's discretion and his personal faith, either religious or secular, who ultimately passed on to the scribe who is well versed in literary sense to select the narrative sequence from the text. In this process of selection the scribe played the dominant role by selecting the major units of the episodes that had to be illustrated by the painters and the importance of the scribe can be confirmed on the basis of scribes' names found on the illustrated manuscript. Two names of scribes worth mentioning are those of Hiranand and Jaswant of Rana Jagat Singh's reign. Jaswant had collaborated with Sahibdin in the manuscript of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (AD 1648) which is available at Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune. The interaction between scribe and painter cannot ruled out and immediate task for the painter was to resolve the selection of the climactic unit of the episode to be depicted. At this point of time, the painter has to instruct and collaborate with rest of the team of the workshop, specialised in different branches of manuscript illustration. Therefore collective consciousness was a dynamic force behind the prolific production of the painted manuscript of Mewar school of painting. Nevertheless in this complex process of division of labour, the creative genius (*pratibhā*) of the master painter never suffered a setback and was admired by royal patrons.

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1. In the two distinct trajectories, the first concerns with artists working for the Hindu Rajput rulers of north India, while the second centres on painters working for the Rajputs overlords, the Mughal emperors. As a matter of historical fact Mughal paintings reached Europe at least as early as Sir Thomas Roe's return to London in 1619, and four decades later they were copied and made known by Rembrandt. And also Mughal paintings were influenced in important ways by European art, and used familiar European visual techniques which also made it easy for the scholarship to take to Mughal paintings easily. The Mughal paintings has been more extensively studied than the former, possibly because it is more compatible with the dominant European art historical methodology, namely

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formalism. Almost all these investigations are within a preconceived notion of a morphological and linear growth of the style, and scholars (from Percy Brown to Milo Cleveland Beach) practised this quite successfully. But slowly shifting their interests onto the individual painters of Mughal times and their stylistic developments, opened up a greater possibility to explore the contribution of these master artists. The identification and comparison of the distinctive styles of different artists is equally significant, for it reveals a respect for artistic individuality familiar to modern viewers. Rajput works on the other hand are the products of many different courts, and are far more abundant and diverse than Mughal paintings. The traditional Rajput patron seldom recognized the expressive contribution of an artist's personal style, and styles seldom developed in meaningful linear sequences. Changes of style in Rajput paintings seem more often to be the result of circumstance than of conscious decision, and traditional European art historical methodologies have seldom been conducive to such a tradition.

2. After B.N. Goswamy's great discovery of one of the well-known Pahari painter Pandit Seu and his family genealogy gave Indian art historian a new methodological tool to investigate inter-state migration of these painters families, thus complicated the search for so-called regional styles in the Pahari schools, foundation of Basholi school in its formative phase was studied quite extensively which paved way for studying the rest of the major regional schools flourishing in the neighbouring centres. (B.N. Goswamy, 'Pahari Painting: The Family as the Basis of Style', *Marg*, vol. 21, no. 4. and The 'Problem of the Artist Nainsukh of Jasrota,' *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 205-10.

3. Shridhar Andhare, *Chronology of Mewar Paintings*, Agam Prakashan, Delhi, 1987.

   In the last decade Ratan Parimoo's quest in order to disseminate the hidden meaning in the painting, based on the poetic phraseology which in fact is the main characteristics of the medieval vernacular literature. This literary source material was the immediate concern for these painters to evolve a unique vocabulary of visual metaphors, and which they succeeded in transforming into paintings. For this interpretative methodology, Ratan Parimoo followed a stereological study in decoding the multilayered meaning lying dormant in the painting and can only be understood unless the scattered visual motifs are reassembled in a narrative. Therefore his scholarship on the studies of Indian painting, beginning with his discovery of Early *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (popularly known as *Parimoo's Bhāgavata*) (ref. Ratan Parimoo, 'A New Set of Early Rajasthani Paintings', *Lalit Kala*, no.17.) to the *Bihārī Satsai* painting, a set of Mewar school and many other regional variants of important narratives depicting single episode in all most all the distinct schools of Indian painting, allowed him to explore non-conventional art historical methodology. His application of *alaṁkāra* theory certainly gives another dimension to his scholarship that is certainly worth recognition and to a great extent can be proved fruitful in relating text and image with a wider understanding of the artwork. (Ref. Ratan Parimoo, 'Uncovering the Meaning of the Picture Puzzles of Bihārī Satsai Painted by Jagannath: A semiotic Study', *East and West*, vol. 45, nos.1-4, 1995.)

4. Karl Khandalawala, "Leaves from Rajasthan", *Marg*, IV-3, June 1951, pp. 1-24, and 'Problem of Rajasthani Painting: The Origin and Development of Rajasthani Painting', *Marg*, XI-2, March 1958, and K. Khandalawala and Motichandra, *New Documents of Indian Painting — A Reappraisal*, Bombay, Prince of Wales Museum, 1958. Till today the art historians concerns were more in the direction of unearthing the so-called dated document or sorting out the problem of "missing links" on the basis of stray painted pages from widely dispersed manuscripts in different government and private collections. For this reason their discoveries are considered as a landmark in the Indian Art History. Their efforts are praiseworthy in collecting information, settling problems of dating, provenance, etc. On contrary, these scholars generated a lot of argumentative methodology for pleading their cases of authentication of a painting to a particular school of painting.

5. One of the most significant period of Indian painting is the sixteenth-century paintings of pre-Akbari phase. The parallel trends overlapping each other, with heterogeneous group of manuscripts from

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different geographical regions of the same time poses a very serious problem in applying the specific methodological tool of style studies. In the near past the material of this period was, no doubt, scrutinised but could not provide any conclusive direction. On the contrary the situation became more perplexing namely with the *Caurapañcāśikā* group of paintings for the disputed provenance and dating. This "clumsy" phase of Indian painting needs careful study so as to understand the origins of Mewar School of paintings.

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# 10

# The Poetics and Politics of Citation in Jodhpur Miniatures

*Debra Diamond*

Perhaps no other field of painting lends itself better to semiotic interpretation than nineteenth-century Rājpūt painting, which is so often a web of cited motifs and compositions.[1] Since the mid-seventeenth century, Rājpūt court artists had created new compositions by tracing or copying elements from the collections of paintings and drawings maintained by their families or the courts. But by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, artists at several courts ceased to suppress the seams between visual appropriations. By focusing on a single painting from Jodhpur, a Rājpūt kingdom in north-west India, I will argue that the motifs painters chose to copy and overtly juxtapose within new images carried within them strands of allusions meaningful — and disturbing — to court audiences. The proposed method has two stages. First I turn to treatises on poetics to posit an aesthetic of citation that shaped the responses of courtiers to paintings. I then situate the resonance of citations within the specific political context of the Jodhpur court, for court paintings were not mere loci for pleasure or devotion, but rather vehicles for active engagement with claims for power, status and legitimacy.

In 1830, the court artist Amardās Bhaṭṭi translated the text of a dynastic history, the *Sūraj Prakāśa* (dated 1730) into a visual cycle for his patron, Maharaja Man Singh of Jodhpur (*r.* 1804-43)[2] (*Pl.* 32). Because the history had not been previously illustrated — indeed it was the first time that this oral-poetic genre so central to Rājpūt values had been transformed into images — Amardas' cycle and the individual paintings are unique. Yet the paintings overtly quote and juxtapose diverse motifs, compositions and spatial systems from earlier court paintings.

Folio 17 depicts Man Singh's eleventh-century ancestor King Padam sporting with the women of his harem in a lotus-filled pleasure pool. While the haloed Padam embraces a favourite, the women frolic: one spits a stream of water at her friend, another is submerged (except for her hennaed hand) in a game of hide-and-seek. They are sheltered by a lush banyan tree, upon whose branches sit pairs of peacocks and egrets, conventional signs of love. Enthroned upon the palace terrace, a queen watches the sporting king. Above the bathers, a nimbate Nāth *yogī* with supernatural powers (the text tells us) flies through the sky with a Sri Lankan princess he has enchanted. The princess espies the handsome king from the sky and drops a golden bracelet to him as a token of her desire.

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For art historians working within an aesthetic canon that values naturalism, harmoniously unified compositions and "original" imagery, the painting's abrupt juxtaposition of radically different spatial systems fractures the composition and points too obviously towards tracing and copying.[3] The palace's deep recession into pictorial space negated elsewhere in the image exposes one-point perspective as a "misunderstood" foreign source; the zigzag edge where the pleasure pool meets the horizon betrays its origin as a river-bank in an earlier painting; the single hennaed hand more clearly evokes a traced motif than a submerged woman. In a formalist account, such pastiche unravels the possibility of an originary moment of creation and the production of historically contingent meaning. Indeed, paintings such as *Princess Padmini Espies King Padam* have been interpreted as the markers of a decline in Rājpūt court culture and painting.[4] But instead of reading the Padam painting through a template that favours originality (and defines its absence as evidence of cultural decay), we can postulate another sort of culture that accommodates, even celebrates, copying.

**The Aesthetics of Citation**

The traditional workshop practice of copying is understood here as citation when the artist actively re-uses motifs (or visual conventions or signs) that create allusions or layers of meaning for viewers. In the aesthetic of citation, the picture plane accommodates heterogeneity and the disjunctions that arise from combining traced motifs are not suppressed. Indeed, these seams between sources foreground the act of citation as a practice that lays claim to, manipulates, quotes, adapts or puns established visual conventions.

Neither art criticism nor painting treatises figure in the rich literary tradition of the Jodhpur courts. Thus, our understanding of reception must be based on other sorts of texts.[5] In order to examine a visual aesthetic based on the rearrangement of pre-existing motifs, we can turn to treatises on poetics that address repetition of literary motifs. Jodhpur court literati (including the Maharaja, his bards and *rani*s and courtiers who were poets in their own right) recognized and appreciated poetic effects. Man Singh's ancestor Maharaja Jaswant Singh (*r.* 1638-78) wrote a didactic treatise on poetics that directly addresses this sort of literate audience. As is typical of treatises on Sanskrit poetics, Jaswant Singh enumerates the mechanisms and advantages of reworking long-established visual equivalences, such as "lotus-like" eyes. These can, for our purposes, be conceptualized in a broader way as an aesthetic exceptionally attentive to gradations of similarity. The most extensive categories are those of metaphor and smile, tropes in which an object is compared, rendered equivalent or substituted for a subject. Examples from the treatise that equate a heroine's eyes with lotuses reveal some of the nuanced relationships between a commonly associated subject and object:

> the lotuses look lovely like your eyes (inverse simile) — 11.2
>
> these eyes are lotuses indeed — what need is there of other lotuses (equivalent metaphor) — 18.1

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she looks with those wide lotus eyes (transference, when the subject acts after becoming the object) — 20.2

her eyes are like lotuses — luscious and broad (ascription) — 31.1[6]

By reiterating the lotus-eye convention, a poet evoked a chain of associations for a literate audience. Refiguring or citing the correspondence triggered memory (of other instances of the same and related correspondences) to trigger mood. The subtle nuances of refiguration — reiteration, denial, transposition or extension of familiar relationships of equivalences — were appreciated in their own right and recognized as markers of the skilful poet's command of a literary tradition.

Although the terms of poetic analysis cannot be directly applied to painting, they provide insight into what I suggest is a parallel aesthetic sensibility operative in painting. Since court audiences enjoyed the minutely calibrated shifts between repeated poetic conventions as the skillful manipulation of motifs and sought to recognize chains of citations as allusions that expanded the significance of a single poetic image, I suggest that decoding visual connections structured the reception of paintings. By offering a pleasure akin to the pleasure of tracing a poetic metaphor through its appearances in various texts, the citation and recontextualization of a canonical image would have motivated Man Singh's literate courtiers to follow a chain of associations.

## Citation as Appropriation

A poetics based on the evocative possibilities of citation rather than innovation suggests that we reconsider visual citation as an aesthetic that invoked meaning for its audience. In order to depict the handsome King Padam, Amardās has appropriated a canonical image (both in the mythology of Kṛṣṇa as well as in Rājpūt painting) of the blue-skinned god Kṛṣṇa sporting with village youth in the Yamunā river. If we compare the Padam painting with one of Kṛṣṇa from the Būndī court (a kingdom south-east of Jodhpur), we see that the two are closely related through a common archetype (*Pl.* 33). In both, a similarly placed blue banyan tree arches over a silver bathing pool, extending branches to the water's surface; Kṛṣṇa/Padam embraces a woman beneath the tree directly below a pair of peacocks (a conventional signifier of romance); two cranes alight upon a *śivaliṅgam* (an aniconic form of the deity) shrine at the painting's lower border; and many of the swimmers' postures are identical, such as the centrally located woman who raises her hands above her head as she floats on her back. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Būndī painters produced numerous versions of Kṛṣṇa sporting in the Yamunā with the cowherd girls (*gopīs*) and the Amardās' painting is directly indebted to that tradition.[7] While the pleasure pool's sheltering banyan and riverine shore evoke the narrative of Kṛṣṇa's divine play in rural Braj as depicted in Būndī painting, the halo behind King Padam's partner has probably been drawn from a Jodhpur tradition of portraying Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's divine lover, as nimbate. (*Pl.* 34) Amardas' inclusion of the double halo behind king and consort indicates that he combined Kṛṣṇaite imagery from two sources (a Bundi tradition of the bathing Kṛṣṇa with a

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Jodhpur tradition of the nimbate Rādhā) to inflect the narrative of Padam and create mood through an allusion to Kṛṣṇa.[8]

In order to posit how an allusion to the deity Kṛṣṇa might have affected the reception of the Padam painting, we turn to the devotional orientation of the Puṣṭimārgīya *sampradāya* and its particular resonance in Rājpūt court culture. Man Singh's grandfather (Bijay Singh) and predecessor (Bhim Singh) as well as many at his own court, were Puṣṭimārga devotees of Kṛṣṇa. In this tradition, the maternal and amorous affections that Kṛṣṇa's enormous charm and beauty inspired, became an important vehicle for the expression of a devotee's longing for God. While devotional poetry expresses a longing in which spiritual and sensual imagery are both fully present and cannot be easily separated, its eroticism can be understood as divine rather than personal. In court poetry and painting, however, an inclination towards the more aristocratic and the more romantically sexualized imagery develops.[9] The image of Kṛṣṇa in court painting was polyvalent, oscillating between spiritual and erotic poles as well as intersecting with established court visual and poetic traditions of the romantic hero. Thus, images of the seductive Kṛṣṇa overlap and intersect with those of the sexualized king. In this light, Amardās' citation of a Kṛṣṇa image for the depiction of Padam emphasises the king's great beauty, making it plausible (within the terms of the narrative) that the princess fell in love with him from a mere glance. Since there is a Rajput poetic and visual tradition of Kṛṣṇa as the archetypal and courtly lover, the substitution of Padam for Kṛṣṇa is, on the simplest level, the invocation of a metaphor of equivalence.

**The Politics of Citation**

If citation can appropriate signs to create mood, it can also, through juxtaposition, subvert established meanings. Details within the painting as well as the narrative of the Padam pictorial cycle read in view of sectarian tension at Man Singh's court suggest that the Padam image ironically lays claim to the Kṛṣṇaite source.

In gratitude for his most unlikely accession to the throne during a war of succession, Man Singh dedicated his kingdom to a perfected being, the *mahāsiddha* Jallandharnath, of the non-Brahminical Nāth order.[10] Within the cultural and religious logic of north India, Nāth *mahāsiddhas* were an eminently plausible source of sovereign legitimacy. But when Man Singh raised his *guru*'s family into a political, religious and economic elite, he displaced the roles and prerogatives that Brahmana priests of the Puṣṭimārga *sampradāya* and his Rājpūt kinsmen had traditionally enjoyed.

Man Singh's devotion to the Nāth *sampradāya* resulted in an immediate decline in the power and wealth of the local Puṣṭimārga *sampradāya*, the Vaiṣṇava order whose priests and temples had been amply supported by the Jodhpur Maharajas preceding Man Singh. The *Mān Singh rī Khyāt* records that Man Singh resumed lands granted in perpetuity to the Puṣṭimārga order and we can surmise that a decline in royal gifts and status accompanied the absorption of their villages into royal territory (*khālsā*).[11] The withdrawal of royal patronage may have originated in what Man Singh perceived of

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as insults to his devotion, for Man Singh insisted on accepting the religious order only on his own terms. On his first visit to a Kṛṣṇa temple after his accession to the throne in 1804, Man Singh attempted to enter the wearing a Nāth ash mark on his forehead, an act that Daniel Gold has construed as a challenge "given the conjunction of courtly and religious protocols in a royal temple visit." Indeed, the priest (*gosāīn*) refused Man Singh admission to the temple and extended the prohibition towards all members of the Nāth *sampradāya*. The Nāths responded with a similar injunction.[12]

Although the Nāths consider Śiva rather than Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu to be the supreme deity, we should not read these battling injunctions as religiously grounded. Indeed, Man Singh wrote devotional poems to Kṛṣṇa throughout his life. At court, the tensions between the Nāth elite and the Puṣṭimārga priesthood were the product of a struggle for influence and wealth, rather than a battle between competing doctrines or theologies. The court poet (*kavīrāja*) Bankidas quite directly articulated the link between royal patronage and sectarian power in a satirical couplet. The verse expresses Nāth concern over Puṣṭimārgīya influence on Man Singh's son, Chattar Singh. Chattar Singh reigned briefly as Maharaja between 1816 and 1818 during the period of Man Singh's seclusion. During this time, Chattar Singh apparently turned towards the Puṣṭimārgīya order. Bankidas' couplet can be loosely translated as: When Chattar Singh chants Govind (Kṛṣṇa), the *kānphaṭa* (literally split-ear) *yogī*s become *gānphaṭa* (literally, ones with split butts).[13]

The Maharaja's patronage of the Nāth order effected their transformation into a potent semi-autonomous state polity that severely eroded the status, wealth and influence of the Rājpūt aristocracy. Within the first twenty years of Man Singh's reign, the nobility's opposition to both the sectarian order and the Maharaja, heightened by Nāth abuses of power, led to a series of armed conflicts, the assassination of Man Singh's first *guru*, a two-year interregnum, and the exile of the kingdom's most powerful noblemen.

In the late 1820s however, after a truce negotiated by the British, the nobility returned to court.[14] Within this political landscape, in which the Maharaja, the Nāths and the nobility were in uneasy rapprochement, Maharaja Man Singh commissioned the illustrated cycle of the *Sūraj Prakāśa*. The dynastic history links Rama and the powerful kings of Kanauj to Man Singh's dynasty, the Mārwār Rāṭhors. The illustrated manuscript abbreviates or elides most of those regnal histories to focus upon relatively obscure ancestors who came to power, like Man Singh, through divine grace. The illustrated manuscript can be understood as an attempt to mediate the allegiance of the deeply fractured court by emphasising the role of Nāths in the Rāṭhors past. It links Man Singh's Nāth *guru*s with Rāṭhors dynastic origins and presents them to the court within two cultural forms central to Rājpūt status, the bardic genealogy and court painting. If the cycle works to legitimate the Maharaja's reconceived sovereignty, the tensions of the court are nonetheless echoed in the visually dissonant manuscript.

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The narrative of Padam specifically, and the illustrated *Sūraj Prakāśa* more broadly, are oriented towards the grace of Śaiva deities and *gurus*. Amardās' manipulation of value-laden conventions in the Padam folio displaces Kṛṣṇa devotion into a Śaiva and ascetic context. His composition situates the image of Kṛṣṇa/Padam between the flying Nāth *siddha* at its top border and a Śiva shrine at its bottom. Moreover, Amardas has shifted the marble *śivaliṅgam* shrine in the pleasure pool from its truncated position at the prototype's lower left corner to a more central location; a bather's outstretched arm further directs our attention to the water shrine. While viewers might interpret the *śivaliṅga* in the Būndī painting as a reference to a real icon (and indeed, Būndī's riverbanks are dotted with small *śivaliṅgas*) or even as a reminder of Śiva's role within the Kṛṣṇa episode (*rāsa-līlā*), Amardās' relocation of the motif towards the Jodhpur painting's centre markedly shifts the emphasis towards from a Kṛṣṇaite to a Śaiva reading. An iconographic reading of the *liṅga* shrine as primarily a symbol of Śiva becomes plausible when we consider that the Śaiva association is anchored by the appearance of the Nāth flying above. Both signs can be interpreted as Nāth references (for Śiva is the greatest deity within the divine hierarchy of the Nāths) that reinscribe the Kṛṣṇaite allusion within a Nāth ambit.

My readings of both court and British archives indicate that the nobility was far more concerned with their loss of power than with soteriological or sectarian conflict. But at least some element of their opposition manifested as sectarian conflict. As early as 1804, Man Singh asked his kinsmen to pay homage to the Nāth *guru*, a practice that was consistent with earlier court ritual. None the less, Man Singh's rigid insistence on compliance provoked conflict. The *Tawariq Man Singh*, which gives us a more critical history than the *Man Singh rī Khyāt*, tells of an episode in which a nobleman, the Thakur of Candāval, refused to bow down to Man Singh's *guru* (Dev Nāth) at court.[15] The Thakur explained that allegiance to his own religious preceptor, a Puṣṭimārga priest (*gosāīn*), would not permit obeisance. Man Singh insisted on the nobleman's public display of conformity, although allowed that he need not feel it in his heart. But when the Thakur only grudgingly complied, Man Singh resumed the nobleman's estate.[16]

Man Singh's extreme punishment (for the Chandaval Thakur was permanently displaced in favour of his son) can be only understood as a response to an affront to sovereign authority. This affront, moreover, was both politically and soteriologically offensive. In the first instance, the Chandaval Thakur refused proper participation in the Maharaja's *darbār*, the primary ritual of political integration in the Rājpūt state. Since the nobility's obeisance to a Mahārāja's spiritual preceptor was not without precedent in *darbār* ritual, it seems fair to surmise that the Chandaval Thakur's resistance was at least partially motivated by political resistance to the Maharaja. It none the less negatively affected Man Singh's own salvation, for the Maharaja regarded his spiritual well-being as dependent upon his respect and devotion to his spiritual preceptors.[17]

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## Reading Citation

By visually framing Kṛṣṇa/King Padam between a Nāth *yogī* and a *śivaliṅgam*, Amardās appropriates Kṛṣṇa for the depiction of the Śaiva court of King Padam (whose chief priest will worship Śiva as the narrative proceeds). That is, the sporting king is relationally like Kṛṣṇa with the *gopī* girls, but his kingdom is Śaiva and the only blue complexion in the scene belongs to the Nāth *yogī*. Man Singh's harsh punishment of the Chandaval Thakur and the tensions between the Nāth and Puṣṭimārga orders indicate that the appearance of a Kṛṣṇaite motif within a visual narrative incorporating a Nāth *siddha* undoubtedly triggered more than innocent reverberations of the blue god's sensual beauty. If the archives do not record the reception of specific paintings, we may surmise that responses to Amardās' composition ranged from simple recognition to fear, for as the Thakur of Chandaval's story relates, the threat of royal displeasure and force lies beneath the surface of court symbolics.

## Conclusion

Considering disjunction and citation as semantically productive aesthetic practices allows us to move beyond the naturalistic-idealized binary of style that has hampered analyzes of nineteenth-century painting and focus instead upon the agentive creation of historically contingent meaning. Amardas' abrupt juxtapositions celebrate the act of pictorial construction as one of quotation and adaption. The cited motifs engage a particular ancestral connection while ironically invoking Man Singh's displacement of an established religious and political order for a polity that incorporated the Nāths. In interpreting the appropriation of a Kṛṣṇa source as ironic — in the sense that there is a deliberate contrast between an established iconography and its relocation in another context — I am suggesting the site of citation as the marker of agency. While the Padam painting's motifs are already established, their reuse is not indicative of timeless kingship. Rather, the painting is part of a motivated programme that manipulates the past for the sake of devotion as well as contemporary political strategies.

## References

1. Drawing upon Umberto Eco's emphasis on the social aspects of signification (*A Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1979), this paper examines traced motifs in Rājpūt painting as culturally shared codes from which meaning is produced.
2. The unbound illustrated manuscript is a unicum containing 70 full-page paintings with red borders on *wasli* paper; textual summaries are written on the back of several folios. The Dingal text is published in *Kāvya Karṇidanjī Cāraṇa Kṛt: Sūraj Prakāśa*, ed. Sitaram Lalas, Jodhpur, 1962.
3. The dominant paradigm is outlined in Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989 and Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983.
4. The intersecting disciplinary discourses that underlie the location of a decline are discussed in Debra Diamond, *The Aesthetics and Politics of Citation: Jodhpur Painting at the Court of Maharaja Man Singh*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 2000.

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5. This strategy was suggested by Michael Baxandall's location of the 'period eye' in *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.
6. Rupert Snell, *The Hindi Classical Tradition: A Braj Bhasa Reader*, Heritage Publishers, Delhi, 1992, pp.151-53.
7. Although the Jodhpur royal collection today does not contain the Bundi archetype, the court collected Bundi paintings; it is more than plausible that Amardas had access to a Bundi source.
8. In semiotic terms, the bathing Kṛṣṇa is the sign that evokes the larger tradition of Kṛṣṇa devotionalism through synecdoche.
9. Vishakha Desai, 'From Illustrations to Icons: The Changing Context of the *Rasikapriya* Paintings in Mewar', *Indian Painting: Essays in Honour of Karl J. Khandalavala*, ed. B. N. Goswamy, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 118-21.
10. Daniel Gold observes that the Nāths exemplify the vulgar ascetic type: their religious goals were immortality and supernatural powers that they often employed for worldly ends and their militant ascetic tradition was open to low-caste recruits. 'The Instability of the King: Magical Insanity and the Yogis' Power in the Politics of Jodhpur, 1803-1843', *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1995, pp.120-23.
11. *Mahārāja Mān Singh rī Khyāt*, ed. N.S. Bhati, Jodhpur, 1972, pp. 29. Man Singh's resumption of Puṣṭimārgīya lands was unusual for such grants were considered permanent gifts; the Maharaja's action was a public display of displeasure. Rajendra Joshi, in conversation, March 1998.
12. *Mahārāja Mān Singh rī Khyāt*, p. 29.
13. Kaviraja Shyamaldas, *Vīr Vinod*, Delhi, 1986.
14. Dasharatha Sharma, *The Role of Nobility in Marwar* (*1800-1873* AD), 1969, pp. 69 -78.
15. Daniel Gold, pp.120-32.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
17. According to Colonel Sutherland, Man Singh explains his connection with the Nāths as soteriologically motivated: "some persons, and he among the rest, looked more to salvation, others more to affairs of the world". Cons. 24 July 1839, *Marwar Precis: Containing a General History of the Relations with Marwar*, Calcutta, 1874, p. 57.

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# 11

# Miracles in the Park: The Design and Politics of a Contemporary Religious Space in Bangalore

*Annapurna Garimella*

Everyday religious architecture, ubiquitous across the contemporary Indian landscape, is one of the least documented and theorized areas in Indian Art History. Architectural historians usually study a few exemplary buildings as part of a larger project to narrate a history of Indian architecture since independence.[1] Otherwise, unless a controversy elicits more attention, most ordinary religious structures exist beyond the scholar's gaze.[2] Designed and built by architects of lesser fame, *śilpa śāstrī*s, *mistrī*s or local societies who pool their resources and labour, these buildings demand serious study because they are important sites of popular devotion and political mobilizaation.

This paper analyzes aspects of everyday religious architecture through a discussion focused on the newly constructed Miracle Park of St. Anthony, located on the outskirts of Bangalore and inaugurated in 2001. Built in the same compound as an early twentieth century church housing a relic of the Catholic saint, the Miracle Park is a new stage in the history of the site. It is part of a widespread trend across southern India where the theme park as the space of secular entertainment is being reshaped and infused with sectarian and/or sub-nationalist agendas. Other similar projects include Lumbini Park in Hyderabad, the Valluvar complex in Chennai and the proposed theme park at Tirupati. Most of these projects are designed in a revivalist mode. The Miracle Park is unique in its Catholic orientation and Modernist design and presents an exceptional opportunity to theorize the vernacularization of Modernism, instead of the revival of tradition, as a response to larger questions of development, class, caste, gender and devotion.

Through a close reading of the Miracle Park's patronage, design and use, this essay puts forward three arguments. The first argument offers a preliminary conceptualization of the relationship between vernacular Modernism as it is practiced outside the metropolitan centre and its relationship to globalization and to "traditional" forms of technology, art and craftsmanship. Modernist architecture historically has represented rationalism, technological advancement and democracy as well as spirituality and mysticism. But, my work at the Park suggests that when self-consciously Modernist and globalized architecture confronts non-hegemonic or "traditional" forms of craftsmanship and

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lower caste worship, the relationship between the two may be modulated by discourses on Indian art and craft first developed during the early colonial period.[3]

The second argument speculates on the politics of St. Anthony's hagiography as it is told in the Miracle Park. The fourteen sculpted scenes of St. Anthony's life represent a selective indigenization of his cult. This paper will suggest that indigenization here is a response to the conflicts that have developed within Indian Catholicism over the last twenty years due to the growth of Dalit liberation theology. The avowed Modernism of the Park and the miracle narrative within it are read as attempts to contain and silence the messy politics of indigenization, especially as they relate to caste and gender issues.

This essay will end by arguing that the Park is unable to contain or erase caste and gender politics. In fact, the Park becomes the space in which Dalit and some non-Dalit visitors develop critical positions. Some outright protest dominant church policies and its patronage of such projects while others, through their actions, obliquely question the authority of the Church and the architect to control their behaviour in the Park.

Until the 1980s, social scientists and academics in the humanities had ignored questions of worship and sectarian practice, especially their status in contemporary society and politics. Roop Kanwar's murder, the Shah Bano case, the demolition of Babri Masjid and Mandal riots have forced these questions upon academia. Yet many art historians have been reluctant to change modes of analysis, reconceptualize the field, and look at contemporary religiosities. This disciplinary reticence is all the more troubling considering the invidious discourse that usually passes for debate on the question of religion and public space. And new spaces such as the Miracle Park demand that standard disciplinary practices of formal analysis and library research be amended by ethnography, new archival material and innovative questions.[4] Art History, long concerned with high art and architecture and more recently with recouped forms of popular art such as calendar images and Kalighat painting, needs to reckon with other, less prestigious but more common forms of artistic production and the discourses in which they are situated.

**The Design and Making of the Miracle Park**

St. Anthony's Church is the oldest and most venerated public structure in Thambushettypalya, a village on the outskirts of Bangalore. It stands at the end of a long avenue lined by many newer Catholic and Christian institutions. These recent buildings belong to a separate, more interiorized part of the town than the church that functions as a community space for village residents. The large compound also has houses the saint's annual feast. With the construction of the Miracle Park, the atmosphere of the feast has become a permanent feature of the site as tourists and pilgrims visit year round.

St. Anthony's claim to fame is that it enshrines the personal crucifix of the twelfth century Portuguese-Paduan saint. The cross came to Goa with the Portuguese and then travelled to Bangalore about a hundred years ago. At that time, the Maharaja of Mysore through his *diwan*, Thambushetty,

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gave the land to the Catholic priest who built the current structure sometime in the early twentieth century. Today, inside the church compound stands a residence for the priest, a school, the Miracle Park and a series of unfinished pavilions.

The church, which dates from the early part of the twentieth century, is designed in the stark neo-classicism that informed many Indian Art Deco buildings of the day, including cinema halls across the country. Its simplicity resonates with the facades of missionary architecture throughout the colonized world, where the front declares the patron's ambitions and hopes whereas the back quietly speaks of limitations. Perfectly symmetrical, the front of the church builds a vertical narrative that starts with the entrance door and ascends, progressively, to the statue of Jesus, the bell that calls the devotees to prayer and the cross that triumphantly reaches to sky. The rusticated surface of the building proclaims the permanency and rootedness of the church, the Catholic faith and the cult of St. Anthony.[5]

The adjacent Miracle Park is designed by Bangalore-based architect Anand Prakash and landscaped by Mohan. A graduate of Malnad College of Engineering in Hassan, Karnataka, Prakash has been in practice for over a decade. He has an eclectic portfolio that includes residences, commercial complexes, theatres and churches, most of which is built in a vernacular Modernism. By the time he received the Miracle Park commission, his work was already familiar to Diocesan officials. Prakash's professional identity is based on a deep dislike for architecture that combines traditional materials with Modernist design and technology and his desire to globalize his design repertoire.

The general public enters the Park through a portico and begins their journey through the circular complex. The predominant materials are stone, cement and ceramic tiles.[6] Stone and cement constitute a link with the Art Deco Modernism of the Church's design as well the Modernism of post-independence architecture. But they are handled in such a way that the sharp classicism of the older structure is rendered fluid by the winding course and expensive landscaping.[7] The architect stated that the Park's circularity makes it "a structure forever" without it becoming a "monument."[8] Hence, the Park remains properly subservient to the church. The miracle pavilions are built in basic geometric forms; for the architect, they echo the Gothic forms of European Christianity without being "too gothic" and encompass the public within the space (*Pl.* 35). Through his design, Prakash sought to construct a perfect narrative space, one that would diminish the importance of the outside world and the claims other religions and spaces might make on the visitor's attention and devotion.[9] This is important to him as each pavilion is meant to be experienced individually and familiarly and is set at an angle so that the next one is not visible. Prakash states that the Park is not the space of collective consciousness or grand evangelism; it is the space where individuals move inexorably towards Christ through St. Anthony. Indeed, the Park's course ends ultimately at the door of the church.

Between the entrance and exit of the Miracle Park are fourteen pavilions. Each miracle is displayed on a platform raised a foot above ground level and to the side are panels that describe the scene to those that are literate in Kannada, Tamil and English. The first scene depicts Anthony's investiture

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into the Franciscan order, the remaining thirteen recount miracles that he performed or induced. These include the times when Anthony sermonized in one language while listeners understood in their own languages, preached to fish, carried the Christ child in his arms, re-attached limbs, prevented his father's wrongful beheading, saved a mother from having her child drown in boiling oil, proved the legitimacy of a baby and the fidelity of its mother, rescued passengers from a shipwreck, converted an unjust king, had Mary appear to him, multiplied bread for the poor and his body remained incorrupt after death.[10]

Although Prakash was involved in the conceptualization of the scenes, Kutti and his team from Kanya-Kumari, makers of popular festival images, sculpted the figures.[11] These figures follow a *śilpa-śāstra* ratio of one is to five, a size that was set by the training and preference of Kutti. Prakash expressed dislike for these proportions and called it the "dwarf" body. Made of plaster, each figure fits a type. The monk-priests are garbed appropriately in Franciscan habits while parishioners wear colourful robes, draped much in the manner of Hollywood and Indian film costumes and in a manner that befits their social rank. As an ardent theatre enthusiast, he also cast around for a set designer to imbue each scene with spirituality. He approached Iqbal, a set designer working for Ninasam, a leftist theatre group. But Prakash who disapproves of "fusion" design and likens its Marxist architectural politics to a state of "confusion", soon became disenchanted with Iqbal. The latter apparently sought to create scenes of medieval European poverty through the social realist aesthetic of straw mats and other low cost "traditional" materials.

The Park's most imposing feature is the granite statue of St. Anthony, towering over the entire site (*Pl.* 36). Church authorities and Prakash chose granite because in southern India, it is a material that signifies history, tradition, devotion, permanency and majesty. The sculpture weighs two and half tons and is seventeen and a half feet high; according to Fr. Anthony Swamy, the priest at the Church who first conceived the Miracle Park, the eight foot tall base is a compressed symbol of all recognizable Indian religions. The bell shape is common to Buddhist and Hindu architecture while the pointed arch forms echo the *mehrāb*s of Islamic architecture. To design and sculpt the statue, they approached the famed Ganapati Sthapati of Mamallapuram, renowned for his skills in *Śilpaśāstra* carving. Sthapati's apprentice initially drew the body of St. Anthony, following the shastric prescription of one is to five. Because he disliked this "too Indian" body, Prakash negotiated, and in his retelling, even bullied the apprentice into altering the scale to one is to six and half. For him, this elongation appropriately "Europeanizes" the saint's body. In his criticism of the *Śilpaśāstra* body, Prakash sounds remarkably like the antiquarians and Orientalists who expressed aversion to Indian sculpture because it did not match the health and vigour of Classical art.[12] Hence his use of the word "dwarf" with reference to the miracle narrative sculptures.

The space I have just described is a complete unit. But soon after the Park was completed and inaugurated, Church authorities including Fr. Anthony Swamy began another series of pavilions around the compound wall. These cement pavilions are in the form of processional palanquins used

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during feast days. Several lie empty while a few already have images installed in them. Robin, a Calcutta artist, made these cement sculptures, which follow in the tradition of "European masters." There are echoes of Michelangelo's "Pieta" as well as Rodin's "Burghers of Calais." Closer to our own colonial history, the style comes directly out of British art schools, such as the one established at Kolkata, where artists copied European works to develop an indigenous artistic tradition of historical narrative.

The work on these pavilions has come to a standstill. Funds have dried up and Fr. Anthony Swamy has been transferred to another church. Today, many of the figures stand in limbo, a frozen procession that cannot move without further human intervention. Prakash is disappointed by these additions even as he admires Robin's artistry. Although he did not say this, it appears that he feels that these architectural and narrative extensions are too baroque in the way they stretch the narrative capacity of the site and befuddle the Modernist clarity of his design.

**The Vernacularization of Modernism at the Park**

Modernist architecture has represented at various moments empiricism and rationalism as well as spirituality and mysticism. As architectural Modernism became a widespread Indian movement in the 1950s when Le Corbusier was commissioned to design Chandigarh, these associations too travelled here. Modernist architecture came to represent India's spiritual and material independence from feudalism and colonialism as well as its development oriented, technologically bright future.

Over time, architects have accepted, questioned and altered the vision that Chandigarh represents and thus domesticated Modernism.[13] One group has resuscitated pre-modern built forms and architectural styles, arguing that such a revival respects India's rich cultural history and most appropriately fills the need for self-esteem and social relevance whereas Modernism is alien and alienating. A second group, trained under Corbusier and critical of traditionalism, has been more or less in favour of Modernist design and Nehruvian social engineering through urban planning and architecture. A third group has adopted a more nuanced stance and is critical of both a romanticized approach to the past and a ready embracing of Modernist technologies. Instead, they suggest that technologies and craftsmanship developed in rural or pre-modern India should be continued or adapted for the present even as built forms must evolve with the changes happening across society. This debate about vernacular Modernism and revivalism has been conducted largely in elite, metropolitan architectural institutions; architects and civil engineers trained in the numerous regional engineering colleges across India stand on its fringes. In such institutions, the stress is on technical proficiency and acquisition of a design vocabulary. Pedagogy is usually not linked to historical, social and political issues.

The last twenty years of economic liberalization has meant that architects, even those trained in non-metropolitan institutions, incorporate globalized design into their repertoire. The Modern Indian Vernacular has emerged as a pastiche of local and global, architectural and non-architectural

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quotations detached from their initial contexts and reset in new situations.[14] For example, Prakash was inspired by Fatehpur Sikri in Agra, Nrityagram, a dancer's colony in Bangalore designed by Gerard da Cunha, Ray Meaker's baked buildings in Auroville near Pondicherry, as well as international architects such as Antonio Gaudi, Hassan Fathy and Paolo Saleri. For example, Prakash borrowed Moshe Safdie's idea of installing the pavement around each pavilion in the shadow of the structure. To plan and thematize the miracle narrative, he visited the official website of St. Anthony's church in Padua, researched at a nearby college libary, visited the Marian cult at Velankkani in Tamil Nadu, and viewed several Hollywood films including *Jesus of Nazareth, Ten Commandments, Ben Hur* and *Cleopatra*. Prakash's example indicates that vernacularization and globalization go hand in hand today and many architects treat these as aesthetic not political discourses. Vernacularization and globalization thus provide the architect an expanded set of design choices; familiarity with this pool of possibilities serves to position the architect (and through him the client) as a "Renaissance" man who can negotiate masterfully the local and the global.[15]

But, vernacular Modernism and globalization also interpellate the architect's practice in ways not entirely under his control. Since the European Renaissance, the architect has been the quintessential figure of modernity.[16] He is author, scientist and social engineer. In our country, the establishment of architecture as a profession, the entry of Modernism and the founding of India as a nation-state are inextricably linked. Some of the most renowned Indian architects have cut their professional teeth in Corbusier's studio as he designed some of the monuments of Modernism in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. As the figure of the architect came to dominate the discourse of building, his skills and knowledge gained a privileged position over less professionalized *mistri*s and craftsmen with whom he had to collaborate.

Over time, as more and more architects received their training in India, Modernism itself has changed and been vernacularized. Architects cannot insist on reproducing Euro-American Modernism without taking into account the conditions prevailing in the Indian building industry.[17] Under such conditions, as interviews at the Miracle Park confirm, the practice of architecture comes into serious conflict with the uneven modernization of or the multiple modernities within the building industry. The presence of formal and informal labour, legitimate and illegitimate finance and the varying professional and social status of architects, civil engineers, *mistri*s, *vastu* specialists, bricklayers and day wage workers often pits one group against another. Architects, with their privileged professional and social status, have greater power over others. Paradoxically, their higher status also renders their position vulnerable because professionalized design is still not highly valued and clients often choose less expensive options to build their projects. Even in design driven jobs, an architect's services can easily be replaced or altered if the client chooses. Prakash disliked Kanya-Kumari Kutti's popular art but was forced to work with him; he admired Calcutta Robin's Europeanized sculpture but was dismayed by introduction of a new narrative cycle, which he neither designed nor was able to monitor. There is enormous pressure on the architect to compromise his Modernism and

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vernacularize his work. There is also pressure to establish his necessity of his presence to the successful completion of the project and exert as much control as possible over the end result. Democratic planning and building in a space such as the Miracle Park becomes a near impossibility in this professional culture.

### The Indigenization of Christianity

The debates surrounding Modernism, vernacularization and globalization that I outlined in the previous section parallel debates within Indian Catholicism about the indigenization of Christianity. As architects have debated the issue of architectural languages and Indian realities, so too Catholic leaders have grappled with the question of how best to make the religion Indian. When the Portuguese began to colonize the Konkan region, from the late sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, conversion and induction of upper caste men into priesthood was the preferred mode of establishing their faith.[18] This was based on their desire to promote Catholicism through local centres of power, which Portuguese colonizers rightly perceived to be dominated by Brahmins. In the process, Christianity began to be indigenized. In the sixteenth century, Roberto de Nobili and his followers learned Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, practised untouchability, founded an *āśrama* for which he became its *guru*.[19] Jesuit missions at Vellore and Chandragiri allowed converts to wear *namam*s on their foreheads after the marks were adapted to look like a cross.[20] In fact, seventeenth and eighteenth century Jesuit missions divided themselves into two categories — Brahmanasamnyasis and Paṇḍaraswamis — to serve higher and lower castes.[21] Even after the active Brahminization of the priesthood ceased, the cumulative effect over the centuries meant that positions of power came to be held by upper caste or Portuguese-Indian men.

After the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), when the Church made a decision to be more responsive to local cultures, another round of indigenization took place.[22] Mass, the sacraments and the liturgy could now be performed in vernacular languages to provide easy access to the laity. In southern India, indigenization was also a response to the changing caste composition of the Catholic community as more and more lower castes, unfamiliar with English and high-church ways, increasingly joined the Church. In church design and worship, Jesus came to be depicted sitting in a *padmasana* while *bhajan*s and the *dholak* sometimes replaced or supplemented hymns and the organ.[23] The Council agreed that Modernist or vernacular architecture could be used as "artistic styles vary from one time and place to another."[24] Such a stance provided the ideological space for the Modern Indian Vernacular, the most prevalent architectural style in urban India, to become a meaningful and officially sanctioned aesthetic. In spite of these changes, caste issues dog the institution as high caste converts continue to occupy its upper echelons while few low caste priests obtain significant positions.

Since the 1970s, liberation theology has found support among Indian Catholics. Also starting with Second Vatican Council, this branch of theology is based on a belief that the Christian gospel "demands a preferential option for the poor," and the Church must participate in struggles for

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economic and political justice — particularly in the formerly colonized, third world.[25] As part of their support for liberation theology, some Catholics began to identify themselves as Dalit and campaigned against their oppressed status within the Church.[26] Today, the Dalit movement within the Church continues to argue that in the name of indigenization, Sanskritic and Brahminic cultural symbols have been adopted while "little serious effort [is] being made . . . to introduce motifs and symbols drawn from Dalit culture in our liturgy, *our architecture styles*, etc . . .[emphasis added]"[27]

Indigenization programmes also have been criticized by the middle ranks of the Church hierarchy. If Dalit theologians have criticized attempts to indigenize as superficial and insensitive to the caste composition of cultural symbols, some nuns, priests and others see indigenization as an unfortunate part in their institution's history and a moment that has already ended. They also see low caste worshippers' attempts to introduce modes of worship such as *puja* and talismans as a symptom of illiteracy and class, not as valuable attempts to indigenize Catholicism from below. This view was repeatedly expressed by some nuns and priest in interviews conducted around Bangalore and at the Miracle Park. During construction and after, Fr. Anthony stated that he prevaricated about whether or not the miracle scenes should be grilled to prevent people from offering *puja*. At the time of our interview, his ambivalence had still had not resolved itself, perhaps because he recognizes that unmediated worship is necessary to augment St. Anthony's power among his followers.

The issue around grills provides an indication of the complicated bind in which church authorities find themselves. They do not want to destroy the current aesthetic, diminish access and put off potential converts. Yet, they do not want excessive indigenization. Grills may protect the miracle scenes but they also may act as a lightning rod for acts of desecration.[28]

The patrons of the Park and their architect also attempted to avoid the radical politics of indigenization when they chose to commission a monumental granite St. Anthony image (*Pl.* 36). For elite patrons in southern India, granite has been historically the stone of choice in which to sculpt gods and saints. Aware that Dalits are the target audience of the Church's evangelism, Prakash sought to ensure that the central figure of St. Anthony does not resemble the politically charged figure of B.R. Ambedkar. Unlike the granite figure of the saint, Ambedkar is usually sculpted in plaster of Paris and erected in public squares in the heart of Dalit neighbourhoods in Bangalore and other southern cities. The use of an expensive and monumental material such as granite is also part of an overall attempt to urge visitors towards the transcendence offered by the saint and Christ and not the liberation theology associated with Ambedkar. To this end, Prakash even embedded the installation of the statue in a quasi-miracle narrative. His story focused on the difficulty of raising the statue until late in the evening when a large enough group had congregated at the site and reached or perhaps willed itself into an emotional yet unstated consensus to see St. Anthony erect. Thus, in the social order that Prakash conceived and his patrons authorized, the materiality of a transcendental St. Anthony is strikingly different from the materiality of a political Ambedkar.

The thematization of Anthony's hagiography provides other insights to the Park's politics of

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indigenization. The architect, following Church policy, sought to bring visitors, especially the poor, closer to Christ through the narrative. By and large, the miracles focus on problems faced most frequently by marginalized people. Language barriers, damage to labouring bodies, kitchen accidents in cramped domestic spaces, frequent financial crises and oppressive politicians trouble most those at the bottom of our hierarchical society. But except for the one miracle that depicts the conversion of an unjust king, the rest do not directly engage the realm of politics. The thrust instead is on cultivating, through indigenous discourses on the family, Church-supported values of faith, filial service, motherliness and chastity. Even in their engagement with the domestic sphere, Prakash and his patrons are chary of radicalization.

When I posed the question to Prakash of how issues of gender and sex were factored into the staging of the miracles, he gave me an answer that again favoured transcendence over a political engagement with the everyday experiences of family life. The adultery miracle where St. Anthony rescues the reputation of a mother, the paternity of her child and saves family life by proving to the father the child's legitimacy and the mother's chastity provides an excellent case study (*Pl. 37*). The mother kneels in front of her naked baby whose correct status has just been proven by St. Anthony who stands in front of her. Her outspread arms indicate her redemption and her reconnection to the mollified husband who is brought to witness the miracle by an elderly male. Another woman with a baby stands to her right, foreshadowing the moment when the naked baby is clothed and ensconced back in the nuclear family. The involvement of community members such as the elderly male and the figure in blue reassures the viewer that Catholic patriarchy does work to protect women from their angry men. Furthermore, the inclusion of actors who are not the main protagonists recreates the texture of Dalit domesticity in which lives are lived out in the community as much as in the privacy of their one-room homes. This staging makes Dalit problems visible for scrutiny and discussion while the nuclear family structure remains unchallenged.

Throughout the miracle narrative, the architect and his patrons want morality to be primary, not questions of gender or sexual politics. Prakash stated that in the adultery scene, he wanted St. Anthony's miraculous powers to resonate with the "feminine" and not "femininity." As I read his use of these words, the feminine means the space of family, domesticity and Church supported morality whereas femininity implies an excessive feminization of the miracle, which then could engender a feminist reading in the viewer. Instead, Prakash sought to create a "unisex" space, which could "elevate" the visitor beyond the contradictions of sex and gender into the realm of the moral. The adultery miracle opens up the dynamics of family life to Church intervention, not the fraught politics and the unfair burdens of sexual chastity placed upon lower caste, lower class women by their men, *puja* and by hegemonic middle class powers, including the Church and the State. I even venture to suggest that in this post-HIV era and after international organizations, with their bourgeois agendas, have made a concerted effort to link development, poverty, health and population control to women's sexuality, the Park's authorities have made moves to foreclose spaces where women

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may safely negotiate their desire in public discourses. The regressive politics of this vernacularized narrative indicates that the architect and his patrons ultimately support the current Pope's dislike for liberation theology and his conservative positions *vis-à-vis* women and family life.

**Visitors at the Miracle Park**

This section will conclude the essay by discussing visitors' attempts to appropriate the Park's space for themselves and their criticisms of the Park. Interviews and observations indicate that however much authorities seek to retain perfect control over use of the site, visitors do intervene. They do so out of pleasure in the site as well as in criticism of it. Let me present a few examples.

According to Prakash, when church authorities initially asked parishioners about their ideas, they suggested spaces such as the Dasara *maidana* in Mysore and buildings that looked like *pagoḍās* or Mexican hats. I believe that parishioners from the village put forth these ideas because of their familiarity with and pleasure in films, especially song sequences shot in numerous tourist sites. Religious sites are frequently the backdrop of these scenes and pilgrimage now has become a form of tourism. For parishioners, desirable modernity and devotion are inflected by the aesthetics of film and tourism, which in turn shape their choice of architectural forms. Prakash grasped this connection, only to reject it as unspiritual. Yet, in his account of design sources for the Park, Prakash provided a veritable world tour of heritage, Modern and contemporary architecture as well as films and other sources.

Why then does Prakash not see links between his modernity and the parishioners'? The answer lies in the historical and structural formations that I discussed earlier, which often discourage architects trained in non-metropolitan institutions to value and strive for a democratic and political practice. As a professional aspiring to a globalized identity, Prakash cannot cede his ideal modernity or spirituality to the wishes of the Park's ultimate consumers. I have already stated that he wants visitors to have a very spiritual and individualized viewing experience, not a touristy one. Viewers must see only one miracle at a time, ponder its moral significance and perhaps rest before proceeding on to the next. Architecturally, this desire is instantiated through the partially hidden platforms, benches and landscaping (*Pl.* 35). Verbally, Prakash justified his wish by stating "we guys cannot see two pretty girls at once." His use of this metaphor indicates that committing to a moral journey in the Park involves internalizing monogamy of experience and restraint of the visitor's potentially promiscuous gaze. On these terms, the only person allowed to have pluralistic vision is the architect.

That such mastery is rarely possible is confirmed by an interview I conducted with a middle-class Catholic couple. A draughtsman in a local, public sector enterprise, Paul stated that he and his family regularly visited churches throughout the city, evaluating spaces and the sermons put forth in them. Many of the churches they visited, especially the newer ones that I am familiar with, have large sculptures in landscaped gardens. Sometimes they also have paintings and small, sculpted narratives illustrating various Biblical stories. Visitors are attracted by the pleasure of a new setting

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and the charisma of the resident priest. Thus, however much Prakash and Fr. Anthony Swamy resist, the distinction between pilgrimage and secular tourism is difficult to constitute and represent in today's religious spaces. In fact, the draughtsman and his wife stated that this place offered them primarily a tourist experience, even as it served a secondary didactic purpose.

Also, since the Park has been thrown open, the security guard at the site told me that young couples constantly and unintentionally complicate Prakash's agenda. Much as in films and in tourist spots, lovers use the benches, ideal in their privacy, to make romance and set forth the mundane feelings disdained by the Park's planners. Hence, one of the main tasks of the guard is to keep visitors moving. This imperative means that any potential that the miracle scenes have to engender a closer engagement with Catholic theology, even in the momentary seconds that lovers can cast their glance on something else besides each other, is lost.

The middle-class couple, Paul and Helen, also criticized the Park's lack of spirituality and politics. They said not only did the space not inspire respect but also the literalization of the miracles diminished the audience's ability to "imagine the miraculous." They were most critical of the scale and the expense of the Park, which remains unfinished and is already deteriorating. Paul said, "We are a poor country. It should be a small construction but let it be good. This is too lavish and clearly there were not enough (funds) to finish the job." This last comment speaks to the fate of the Miracle Park. Like many unfinished secular development projects that are too centered on an individual or small group's initiative, this project too has halted midstream. Many of the completed sections are falling apart, as the new priest seems to have neither the resources nor the interest to maintain and cultivate this place. In their criticism, even these middle-class people, who did not identify themselves as followers of liberation theology, insist that the site retain an engagement with the very questions that the architect and his patrons have tried to silence.

Toward the end of our conversation, Paul surmized that lower class Dalit worshippers have taken the missing fingers in many of the St. Anthony statues to worship at home as relics and display as souvenirs. His theory suggests that in some visitors, the site and its statues may engender appropriation of its parts while for others, the site may be so unfamiliar and perhaps even hostile, that in their disenfranchisement they take broken fingers to make the saint theirs and thus bring him to a more comfortable space. Whether Paul's claim or my interpretation of it is borne out by future research or not, it is clear that the Park is not being used with the agenda that the architect had in mind.

Dalit women's use of the Park further displaces the ability of church officials to control their behaviour. In our interview, Fr. Anthony Swamy stated that he did not want the reverence of the saint to be Indianized through acts such as *puja* or offering of talismans. Such behaviour within the Park could easily detract from the supremacy of the church where the priest controls worship. On the other hand, I sense that Fr. Anthony does not want to deflect women's devotion from the saint, which then could translate into problematic veneration of his priesthood. In one visit to the site, I saw Dalit women of all classes seek his blessings. Starting out in a standing position to receive them,

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they lowered into appropriate genuflection and insisted on receiving a second round of blessing (*Pls.* 38 & 39). Whether the Church after the Second Vatican Council would approve of this or not is unclear. But when the kneeling women insisted that a reluctant and embarrassed Fr. Anthony give them blessings in a space designed to engender respect for the saint not him, they momentarily made the space their own.

For the Park's authorities, *puja* is the most challenging form of indigenization because it is not only outside Catholic liturgy but also contains the potential to domesticate, privatize and feminize the public and patriarchal space of the church. Besides Hindus, low caste Catholic women offer garlands, candles and lamps along with their prayers throughout Bangalore's churches and shrines. When I have asked them about the relationship between *puja* and gendered devotion, they appear to circumvent official discourses on worship and domestic morality. At St. Mary's feast held at Shivajinagar in 2001, I witnessed a preponderance of female domestic, construction and agricultural workers, who also are mothers and wives, make offerings. As women who labour, live and love under difficult conditions, their experiences are often incommensurable with and cannot be circumscribed to the cautious indigenization and middle-class morality the Church promotes. Offerings of money, cradles, and tin foil images stamped with limbs, cows and babies along with flowers, incense and candles indicate that working, lower class and caste women negotiate a range of problems that sanctioned worship does not fully address to their satisfaction. With forms of devotion tolerated ambivalently by church officials, women solicit saintly and divine intervention to rectify their financial troubles, heal their injured limbs, ensure the welfare of cattle and obtain relief from a barren womb that so often causes marital discord and mental anguish. At Shivajinagar, women's need for *puja* space is so intense that when officials cancelled the offerings line in 2000, it had to be reinstated the next year due to widespread demand.

At the Park, the example of Mary Fatima, a fifty year old mother from a carpenter family, indicates that even women who see themselves primarily as homemakers do not necessarily toe the Church's line on appropriate domesticity. When questioned during her *puja* to St. Mary about the relationship between gender, domesticity and spirituality, she stated that women are more devoted because they are at home. It is harder to ascertain the quality of men's devotion since they go out. Implicit in her behaviour at the Park is a belief that *puja*, contrary to the opinion of church authorities, is a soteriologically valid act for Christians to perform in public and presumably at home as well. Mary Fatima's statement also suggests that she is in agreement with church leaders that low caste women, by circumstances or choice, are the primary managers of family relations and domestic devotion. However, this does not mean that their worship practices, homes and femininities are necessarily the site for Church intervention. On the one hand, she agrees with the message of the adultery miracle by suggesting that maintenance of chastity is domestic and a spiritual matter. But she also contradicts the Church by implying through her words that chastity is not just a spiritual concern for women; men's salvation too is tied to appropriate morality in the domestic sphere.

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In Mary Fatima's view, as I interpret her actions and words, domestic spaces and acts of devotion can also provide space to articulate a moral femininity. This femininity cannot be cleaved easily to the Church's rhetoric of home, hearth and the nuclear family. Her words are a loaded reflection on what being inside the home might mean in a world where men roam about, sometimes out of desire, sometimes out of force, in search of work, drink and perhaps other relationships. However much the Park's authorities disavow these realities, it is the built environment of the Park that engendered her brief but telling comment.

## References

1. Even an exemplary book such as Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity — India 1880 to 1980*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997 has a very minor discussion of this category of buildings.
2. Even when controversies surround certain projects such as the Ram Mandir at Ayodhyā, Satī temples in Rajasthan, or the Tiruvalluvar statue in Bangalore, its usually social scientists and historians who first bring serious attention to these structures.
3. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1992 edn., pp. 105-202 *passim*.
4. This essay locates and interprets the Miracle Park through the discourses I have outlined above. Formal analysis, interviews at the site and other Bangalore shrines and churches, research into Dalit Christian theology and recent developments between the Church, the State and civil society especially as report in popular print media have been crucial to my theorization of the Park.
5. The interior equally promotes an aura of stability through symmetry. The pews are movable, most likely to allow more seating on the red oxide floor on days when large crowds congregate. The high, beamed ceiling substantiates the stability offered by the exterior. European popular prints of Christian narratives hang high on the walls and the clerestory and the small windows fill the space with light and air while controlling the amount of dust and heat that can enter the space. In many ways, this part of the interior continues to reflect older ways of community life, before St. Anthony acquired great fame or cultic status.
6. Ceramic tiling has become popular in religious spaces in the last twenty years because it is a low-cost material (compared to marble) that retains its sheen over a long period of time with little maintenance. It is also a sign of access to modern technology.
7. Mohan, the landscape designer, combined patches of lawn, potted plants, flowering bushes, small trees which will grow over time, if properly maintained, into natural and lush screens that will further soften the current harshness of the stone.
8. Although Prakash would disavow this connection, curved lines, strategically situated benches and partially enclosed or covered scenes allow visitors to meander through this space much as in a museum. Prakash even wanted to avoid any resemblance to a curated art show where audiences, however spatially controlled, still tend to run "helter-skelter". Ultimately, he feels his design agenda is a success if people 'do not spit and eat groundnuts'.
9. Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia provides a useful framework through which to think through the gender, caste and class politics of the Miracle Park. A heterotopia is an unusual space or place whose extraordinary quality provides sharp glimpses into the construction of our social order. Heterotopias provide this because they either have the quality of disorderliness, for example a brothel, or because they offer a certain kind of compensation in their "lab-like perfection". For Michel Foucault's

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theorization of heterotopia, see his 'Of Other Spaces, Utopias and Heterotopias', in *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Joan Ockman, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation and Rizzoli, New York, 1993, pp. 420-26. Mary McLeod, '"Other" Spaces and "Others",' in *The Sex of Architecture*, eds. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1996, p. 16. In this essay, McLeod criticizes Foucault's emphasis on the extraordinary so that everyday spaces most available to women are almost completely ignored in the theorization of heterotopia.

10. These events fit broadly into the three of the four categories of miracles recognized by the Catholic Church. These include moral, physical and nature miracles.
11. Their sculptures resemble the Anthony processional image housed inside the church.
12. Mitter, pp. 73-188.
13. Lang, *et al.*, pp. 187-296.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-39.
15. I use the sex specific "men" and "his" consciously as a small way to mark architecture as a largely masculinist profession.
16. It is only after the Renaissance that figures such as Michelangelo, Brunelleschi and Alberti become possible.
17. Lang *et al.*, p. 248.
18. Walter Fernandes, *Caste and Conversion Movements in India*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1981, pp.11-13.
19. Interview with Father Anthony Raj Thumma in *Religion, Dialogue and Justice*, ed. Yoginder Sikand, Yoginder Sikand, Bangalore, 1999, p. 44 and Fernandes, p. 17.
20. Fernandes, p. 17.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 18
22. 'The Council and the Liturgy', *The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, http://www.christusrex.org/www1/cdhn.v1.html.
23. See the entrance at Dharmaram College, Koramangala, Bangalore for such an image of Christ. See 'Sacred Art' and 'Sacred Music' in *The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, http://www.christusrex.org/www1/cdhn.v1.html.
24. 'Sacred Art', *The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, http://www.christusrex.org/www1/cdhn.v1.html.
25. 'Liberation Theology', *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001. http://www.bartleby.com/65/li/liberati.html. Since the 1980s, the Church under Pope John Paul II has condemned the movement, accusing its members of advocating violent revolution and Marxist class struggle.
26. Interviews with James Massey and Father Dr. Ambrose Pinto in *Religion and Dalit Liberation*, ed. Yoginder Sikand, Yoginder Sikand, Bangalore, 2000, pp. 11-29.
27. Emphasis is mine. Interview with Mohan Raju in *Religion, Dialogue and Justice*, p. 22. I presume that as yet no single set of Dalit cultural motifs and symbols has been as Dalit communities vary across the country and activists seeking to fight oppression would advocate a pluralist approach.
28. In any case, recourse to grills would demonstrate a profound lack of faith in St. Anthony's capacity to protect his followers, especially his own relic and church.

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# Part III
# Citing Formalism and Iconography

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# 12

# History as Allegory: The Bhaja Narratives

*Deepak Kannal*

This concise paper attempts to suggest a fresh postulate inspired by a sculptural panel of Sātavāhana era for the study of Indian historiography, which supposedly is a non-existent discipline in Indian scholastic tradition. It is true that barring a few stray references to it in *Itihāsopaniṣad*, the date of which is still unknown, *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya or *Śukranīti* we do not come across any theoretical discussion in this area unlike the consistent evolution of historical philosophy in Europe. Kalhana is the only historian, about whom we can be sure off, who claims to have saved his work from personal prejudices and baseless information. However, his *Rājataraṅgiṇī* does not conform to his claims.

The antiquity of the term *itihāsa* goes back to *Atharvaveda*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, *Sāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, or Yāska's *Nirukta*.[1] The Indian scriptures use this term often but quite loosely, without any specific definition. The perennial debate that goes on in the western tradition right from Voltaire, Gibbon to Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Toynbee is unknown to the Indian scholastic world of that era.

It is hard to believe that a civilization with a history of several thousand years can exist without historical and historiographical knowledge and sensibility. The historical references in all the *Purāṇas*, the *saṁvat*s and *śaka*s founded by the emperors, their dated inscriptions and copper-plates may not fully qualify the western notion of history, but they certainly evince the existence of this discipline. And further the principles and rationale of which need to be probed into with a fresh perspective.

A large and often cited sculpture from Bhaja caves (*Pls.* 40, 41) leads us to a possible understanding of historical sensibility in ancient India. This panel is the only significant sculptural work in Bhaja and probably the first major sculptural endeavour in the western Indian rock art tradition. Considering the chronological position of Bhaja caves and its obvious stylistic affiliation with the Andhra idiom, the sculpture has been granted a significant slot in the history of Indian art. It spreads on the entire eastern wall of the verandah of the nineteenth *vihāra*, divided vertically into two halves by an opening that leads to a small *upavarṇaka*. The left half portrays a royal charioteer flanked by two attendants (*Pl.* 40). The chariot drawn by four horses is borne by a fluffy, floating demonic figure hovering in space like a cloud with enormous but weightless mass. The charioteer riding on the

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cloud was tentatively identified as Sūrya by Ananda Coomaraswamy[2] in the absence of any specific iconographical attributes, and later on referred to by many scholars conforming the same identification, possibly merely as a matter of convenience.

On the right half, a regal figure riding a tall elegant elephant is carved (*Pl.* 41). The elephant appears to be trampling over villages and jungles, which are portrayed in miniature scale. Coomaraswamy identified this figure as Indra. Like the so-called *Arjuna's Penance* in Mahabalipuram, this identification too continued to be in vogue in want of more convincing interpretation till it was identified as *Mandhata in Uttarakuru* by V.S. Agrawal[3] and Gyani.[4] The description of Mandhata trampling over the bodies of subjugated demons found in *Divyāvadāna* justifies this identification fully, but the possible date of the text (*c.* AD 200 to 350) is later to this sculpture.[5] Moreover the sculpture is too complex to be interpreted so literally. Robert De Caroli too in his long paper in the journal *East & West* opines that "any attempt to read either of these reliefs as having only one meaning is an exceedingly difficult prospect due to the fact that they incorporate such disparate imagery."[6] I propose a closer examination of the sculptural works under scrutiny, and it seems to be a historical statement heavily loaded with political connotations, which needs to be deciphered in the context of contemporaneous political developments.

The political sovereignty proclaimed by Ceta Kharavela and Simuka Satavahana after Aśoka's death and the acrimonious revolt of Pushyamitra Shunga against Maurya Brihadratha caused tremendous political turmoil all over the subcontinent. India was divided into four quarters, Śuṅgas in the north, Sātavāhanas in the south, the Jaina Empire of Kharavela in the East and the Indo-Bactrian Buddhist rule of Menander in the west. In the first quarter of second century BC, Kharavela and Menander posed a lateral invasion on the territory of Śuṅgas and Sātavāhanas. The repeated proclamations of Śuṅgas and Sātavāhanas heralding themselves as saviours of Vedic Brahminical culture could have inspired the alliance of non-Vedic rulers like Kharavela and Menander, who in a simultaneous action tried to clamp the Śuṅgas and Sātavāhanas from both the sides. Menander rushed into Śuṅga territory conquering Saurashtra, Malwa, the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and headed towards Pataliputra. Kharavela on the other hand encroached into Sātavāhana empire defeating the Rāṣṭrika-Bhojaka *sāmanta*s and destroyed the Mushika Nagari. At this juncture the Śuṅgas and Sātavāhanas joined hands and began the counterattack. Sri Satakarni took on Kharavela in 171 BC. The Śuṅga Sātavāhana alliance successfully faced the aggression. Kharavela was defeated at the hands of Sri Satakarni and Menander too was pushed back in 153 BC.[7] The well-known inscription of queen Nayanikā issued at Naneghat on the occasion of the *aśvamedha* stands testimony to this conquest and felicitates the emperor on his victory.

I propose that the inadequately though not erroneously identified sculptural panel from Bhaja is a visual record of Sri Satakarni's conquest over Kharavela. The curious and unique delineation of this sculpture calls for its reexamination and reinterpretation. The demonic cloud like figure is never seen in any of the Indian sculptures and it is not a codified iconographic depiction. This relief

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extends on the adjoining wall where a medley of clouds with ferocious faces and enormous bodies is carved. V.V. Mirashi quotes a *śloka* from *Divyāvadāna*, which says that Mandhata (or Murdhata as he is mentioned in this text) trampled over the bodies of *asuras* to enter into the conquered city. The iconic portrayal of Mandhata is not unusual in this period and region. It is seen at places like Jaggayyapeta and Amaravati, but a detailed narrative depiction is not seen anywhere else.

I think along with the principal or literal meaning (*abhidhā*) the sculpture also has an implied metaphorical connotation (*lakṣaṇa*) which tries to exploit an epithet of one of the most powerful enemies of Sātavāhanas. The Hathigumpha inscription at Khandagiri-Udaigiri describes the conqueror Kharavela as Mahāmeghavāhana — the one mounting a giant cloud.[8] The charioteer in the Bhaja relief is perhaps none other than Kharavela. This contention is strengthened by the other panel that lends itself for a more complex semiotic interpretation. The miniature village scene has numerous intricate signifiers hinting at various political references. The locale is divided into two by a tree quite similar to the *bodhi* tree. The right side is full of puzzles.[9] A female with an animal head resembling a mouse is being hustled by an armed man. An animal being overpowered by another animal and between the two legs of the elephant a cat devouring perhaps a mouse.

The mice perhaps represent the Mushika Nagari, which was attacked and destroyed by Kharavela — the cat. The mouse headed woman is a personification of the city being routed by Kharavela and the rejoicing on the left of the *bodhi* tree implies Satakarni's conquest over Kharavela. Rāṇo Satakarni is called as *apratirathacakra* in the Nasik inscription. This epithet is used for the Buddhist mythical emperor Mandhata. The attributes of Mandhata like *uṣṇīṣa*, *chattra*, *strī*, *patākā*, and *cakra* are traceable in this relief and that is why it was identified as 'Mandhata in Uttarakuru' earlier. It seems that Sri Satakarni is identifying himself with the Buddhist hero to win over the Buddhist community in his empire, which must have been fairly large in number. The inscription found in the Buddhist caves also hint at the affluence of this community. The Jetavana episode divulges the economic status of the followers of Buddha. The Sātavāhana inscriptions though keep proclaiming their Brahminical origin and projecting them as the saviours of Vedic religion; *khatiyadapamanamadana* (destroyer of the power and might of *khatriyas*), *ekabrāhmaṇa* (a unique, or the one and only Brahmana, *śakayavanapahlavanisūdana* (subjugator of the Śakas), *vinivartita caturvaṇyasaṁkara* (the one who put an end to class adultery) are some of the epithets found in these inscriptions. Their attempts to appease the Buddhist too are quite conspicuous. The handsome grants to the Saṁghārāmas, the cancellations of the earlier grants of Nahapana and Ushavadata and the re-installation of the same grants betray the attempts towards seeking acceptance from this section of the society.

The Śuṅga Sātavāhana alliance was likely to be viewed as the Brahminical front against the Jaino-Buddhist and in the light of other evidence it seems that Sri Satakarni wanted his victory to be received without any religious overtones. The Naneghat inscription admires the Sātavāhanas for their religious tolerance (*sahiṣṇutā*). The Bhaja sculpture perhaps in an attempt to substantiate the same. It is an attempt to construct an allegory of Mandhata and extend it to Sātavāhana times by

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identifying the mythical character with the real. A similar practice is discernible in the *Jātaka* tales in which Buddha relates the characters of the *atīta kathā* with his *antevāsins*.

Other Indian emperors have carved such allegories in different ages. Viṣṇu is one of the most popular of them (*na viṣṇu pṛthvīpati*). The Udaigiri Varāha, the Thiruchirappalli Gaṅgādhara, the falcons and pigeons in Rājasthānī painting or the allegories in Jehāngīrī paintings are some of the countless examples.

It is a different way of reconstructing history, which may be explained in the light of Kauṭilya's definitions of history (*purāṇam itivṛttam ākhyāyikodāharaṇam dharmaśāstram ca iti itihāsa*)[10] which appears to be paradoxical but the purpose of this discipline that he pleads for (*itihāsa purāṇābhyām bodhayet arthaśāstravid*)[11] would justify his definition. He says that the purpose of knowing history is to understand *Arthaśāstra*. He prescribes that the prince must spare some time everyday to "Listen to history." For him, history is the inference of the individual efforts, which can't evade the bearing of space and time on them. And it is the resultant of the reciprocal bearing of the known (*mānuṣam*) and the unknown (*daivam*) on each other. Understanding history is to understand this reciprocal bearing and not merely the chronology of events. The events here are seen as autonomous units or motifs, which lend themselves for interpretation in the given context. The notion of time is not visualized in a linear, cyclical or sequential manner as proposed by the western historians. Historical events, as Cāṇakya pleads are *udāharaṇas* — illustrations that transcend the limits of time and still retain their validity in their new context. The allegories sited earlier are such *udāharaṇas* devoid of the time context.

This perhaps is the reason why mythology/epics and history (*Purāṇa, ākhyāyikā, itihāsa, purāvṛtta*) are considered synonymous in Indian historiography.

**References**


1. Sadashiv Athavale, *Itihāsache Tattvajñāna*, Prajna Pathshala, Wai, 1986.
2. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Leipzig, 1927, p. 25.
3. V.S. Agrawal, *Indian Art*. Ref. Mirashi, V.V., *Sātavāhana ani Paschimi Kshatrapa yancha Itihāsa*, (in Marāṭhī) Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Samskriti Mandal, Mumbai, 1979.
4. R.G. Gyani, 'Identification of the so-called Surya and Indra figures in the cave No. 20 of the Bhaja Group', *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*, I, 1950-51.
5. V.V. Mirashi, *ibid*, argues that the story of Mandhata was well known and popular in India even before the compilation of *Divyāvadāna*.
6. Robert De Caroli, 'Reading Bhaja: A Non-Narrative Interpretation of the Vihara 19 Relief', *East and West*, vol. 50, no.1-4. Dec. 2000, pp. 259-80.
7. There is a controversy over the exact date of this event as one of the inscriptions that could be associated with these events, i.e., the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela does not mention any date and the Naneghat inscription of Naganika though had these details, is badly eroded. I am relying on the dates suggested by S.A. Joglekar in his *Hala Sātavāhanachi Gathasaptashati* (in Marathi), Prasad Prakashan,


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Pune, 1956. The dates ascribed by Mirashi (*op. cit.*) too are not quite far from these.

8. *'Mahārājena Mahāmeghavāhanena Cetirājā. . . .'* Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1942, p. 207.
9. De Caroli (*op.cit.*) is the only scholar who takes note of these curious details, though he reads and interprets them differently. The apparent incongruity in the depiction is recognized as *mukhyārthabheda* in Indian linguistics, the device normally employed to hint at the metaphor.
10. *Arthaśāstra*, 1-5. (Marathi Trans.), ed. J.S. Karandikar & B.R. Hivargaonkar, G.R. Muley, Karjat, Maharashtra, 1927.
11. *Ibid.*, 5-96.

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13

# The 'Subjectivist Turn' in Indian Temple Architecture[1]

*Ajay Sinha*

In this paper, I offer a recent scholarly discussion on a group of stone monuments in the Karnataka region of south India to draw attention to the instability of scholarly practice through which historical knowledge is produced. The paper evolved from questions of how do we know past history and what is the status of evidence we bring to bear on that knowledge — questions Prof. Ratan Parimoo instilled in his students for over three decades. While the contest of knowledge is always staged at the site of hard, archaeological evidence, my argument is that knowledge itself relates to the resonance of meaningfulness a scholar is able to generate at the confluence of interests in our own time. To ground my critique of knowledge, let me begin with archaeological evidence.

In the eleventh century, a remarkable architectural experiment took place in stone monuments in the Karnataka region of south India. Contrary to evolutionary trends in which Indian sacred architecture is usually defined, these Karnataka temples demonstrate a deliberate attempt on the part of their designers to modify and reorganize their regional tradition. I documented these Karnataka temples in the December 1996 issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, and subsequently explored their history in a book.[2] What follows is a brief description of what I see as distinguishing features of these monuments, and a critique of my views by English architect-scholar, Adam Hardy, in a recent issue of the same journal.[3]

Hardy and I agree that these eleventh-century temples are based on the regional tradition of south Indian architecture, called Dravida, known in Karnataka at least since the seventh century. As in those earlier Dravida temples, the eleventh century monuments derive from a *Kūṭina* morphology, as it is described in architectural texts of the time, and recognized best in these temples by a superstructure of horizontal stories that represents the shrine as a multistoried palace. (*Pl.* 42.) Each storied level of this *Kūṭina* superstructure is distinguished by a balustrade course, called *hāra*, having a chain of small architectural motifs, such as little domed structures, called *kūṭas*, for the four corners, and a barrel-vaulted motif, called *śālā*, for the centre.

What is remarkable about the eleventh century temples in Karnataka, however, is that their

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designers introduce within a *Kūṭina* frame a series of architectural innovations that substantially reorganizes the local tradition of Draviḍa architecture. They obscure the progression of storeys, and in essence negate the architectural logic of a Draviḍa superstructure. In the Kalleśvara temple at Kukkanur, *c.* AD 1025, illustrated here, this is done by hanging a circular dormer below the one facing the central *śālā*, the lowest of which is even cut deeper, lobed and decorated with lotus buds, in essence obscuring the architectural supports for the *hāra* balustrade. The vertical chain of circular dormers thus created in the centre of the superstructure reflects a formal logic of a North Indian *nāgara* temple. In particular, it refers to a vertical band of interlinked dormers, called *latā*, projecting in the centre of the tall, curvilinear tower of a typical *nāgara* temple.[4] Kukkanur refers to this North Indian detail, but in fact uses the South Indian formal vocabulary to do so. After Kukkanur, the additional *nāsī* dormer takes on an elaborate shape of a trefoil arch, which creates a nest for miniature shrine models in the centre of each storey.[5]

There are other remarkable innovations, such as a manipulation of the orthogonal plan of the temple to create angled offsets, seen by mid-eleventh century on the central projection of the eastern shrine of the Joḍa Kalaśa at Sudi. (*Pl.* 43) This experiment is documented nowhere in the entire region of South India, and relates so closely to temples of seventh-eighth centuries in North India[6] that I proposed a self-conscious, even historicist, awareness of pan-Indian architecture in Karnataka at this time. Evidence of this regional awareness is also fully conveyed in depiction of various regional temple forms as architectural models, as well as architectural fantasies created out of them, on the temple's decorative surface. (*Pl.* 44)[7]

Built in a short span of a century, in a narrow geographical region of northern Karnataka, and even on a single conceptual plan of twin shrines such as the Sudi complex, these temples are so diverse in design that they force us to acknowledge the active role of designers in inventing shapes and thereby recreating their architectural tradition. An inscription found in the twin, Joḍa Kalaśa, at Sudi, mentions its designer, Shankararya, by name and states that he "constructed in the middle of the town of Śuṇḍī a dwelling for Nāgeśvara so that the finials were completed in a manner that none could possibly imagine."[8] The amazement of the scribe is fully justified by the unusual experiments of the eastern shrine of the Joḍa Kalaśa, but it is also important to see the inscription as contemporary evidence of a public recognition of these architects and their inventions.

This kind of visibility given to the designers of temples in Karnataka may be unusual in India, unless their invisibility is a feature of our scholarly understanding of ancient Indian architectural practice. My interest in these eleventh century Karnataka monuments was to explore in them the usually overlooked fact of the agency of architects in making choices and shaping their ongoing architectural tradition in ancient India.[9]

In his article in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Adam Hardy criticized my account of the local history of these temples, and rejected my analysis of architectural inventions in

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eleventh century Karnataka. Hardy argued that Karnataka's inventions were nothing but a continuation of the various evolutionary patterns seen in traditional Dravida architecture of south India. I offer Hardy's essay as a case in historiography because it extends in a new direction the dominant tradition of architectural history in India, one that has also gained institutional currency in England and in India, and has inspired theory and practice of architecture alike.

Hardy's work is related to the archaeological tradition of the nineteenth century, especially in its interest in collecting and classifying a vast archive of visual and material artefacts to create different orders of historical knowledge (*Pl.* 45). Hardy's analysis is encyclopedic in scope and remarkable in details. It pays close attention to the architectural features and ornamental motifs of Karnataka, bringing to them an architect's understanding of formal relationships and evolutionary trends. An exemplary series of sketch drawings of ground plans, axonometric views, carved motifs, as well as conceptual vectors, arranges six centuries of temple architecture in Karnataka into systematic "patterns of development through time," defining a single architectural tradition Hardy calls the "Karṇāṭa Dravida Tradition." The broad, inclusive view of six centuries is essential to Hardy's study. He claims that, only then can we "see the overall shape of a tradition beyond lulls and vicissitudes," and be able to distinguish the evolution of one tradition from that of other similar traditions.[10]

According to Hardy, the regional tradition of Karnataka was unified by a set of coherent principles that were used in all sacred architecture in India. A sequence of drawings, marked with guiding arrows and points of views, well demonstrate Hardy's central thesis, namely, that sacred architecture in India expresses a single idea, that the temple is a "monument of manifestation", conveying in individual monuments as well as their evolution through time, the proliferation of a cosmic divinity (*Pl.* 46).

Hardy borrows his idea of manifestation from Stella Kramrisch, who has explained the ritual significance and symbolic morphology of temples by synthesising archaeology with interpretative traditions of ancient India extensively using the *Purāṇa*s and *Vāstu Śāstra*s. Kramrisch's classic, the *Hindu Temple*, published in 1946, fully elaborates on the way stone temples embody a sacred cosmology within a Purāṇic world-view. Only, quite literally, Hardy applies Kramrisch's cosmological framework to a formal sequencing of regional temples, making architectural history a transparent record of a core idea.

Using Kramrisch, Hardy defines key principles of composition by which architecture translates the sacred idea into a visible reality. His principles are based on a novel conception, namely, that temple forms evolve through a fragmentary process, beginning from a single module that Hardy has called an aedicula. In aedicular composition, he says, "the whole temple form is made up of many small temple forms of various kinds, conceived three-dimensionally and as if embedded or interpenetrating." As monuments evolve through history, they also combine various kinds of aediculae

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into what Hardy calls "a process of centrifugal emergence, expansion, and proliferation, and simultaneously a process of dissolution and reabsorption."[11]

It is to Hardy's credit that he introduces into an archaeological study of temples a keen sense of their living quality. His operative principles and modular variables create an algebra for animating Indian temples with an inner rhythm. Axonometric sketches and vectors use directional arrows to demonstrate, from a god's point of view, a hidden intelligence that makes regional traditions inherently dynamic and inventive (*Pl.* 47). In this dynamic vision, temples generate a downward relay of forms starting from their tip and finishing off at an expanded base. Buildings thus evolve in space as well as time from a single point of beginning towards more and more differentiated forms. Monuments also expand outwards, from a unified core in the centre of the sanctum out into the four directions.

Hardy's notion of the creative principle embedded in temple architecture differs from my interest in architectural inventions in a particular historical period in India. When applied evenly to all architecture, Hardy's algebraic system begs the question of the particular historical variables architects choose in eleventh century Karnataka in order to transform their local tradition. For Hardy, variables are interchangeable, for me they are not. I relate Karnataka's inventions to the mediation of individual architects, proposing to come closer to the role of historical agencies in the ongoing tradition of regional architecture. Tempting as it may have been to see these architects as if they were gods, or at least individual modernists who often declare themselves in inscriptions as the divine architect, Viśvakarman, I actively disclaim any insight into the subjective will or the inner workings of the minds of these god-like makers, to which I have no access either through monuments, or inscriptions, or textual traditions. Instead, I explore a cultural economy within which the mediation of human architects could be treated as part of the historical reality of eleventh century Karnataka.

In his *JSAH* article, Hardy calls my refusal to acknowledge insight into the minds of the architects as a "modesty," not a position on history. In a footnote that is useful for historiography, Hardy writes,

> Less modestly, I would claim exactly that insight, at least to the extent that an appropriate way of seeing is a matter of grasping the composition, the conceptual structure, and thus the way in which the architects thought about and created the form.[12]

The relationship between visual form and conceptual structure is not new in the history of Indian temple architecture. What is new is the particular set of assumptions underlying Hardy's historical method. First is the belief that the formal composition of a temple is such that it gives a scholar access to the inner workings of the minds of the architects. I call this claim a "subjectivist turn" in a study that is otherwise fully engaged with detailed recording and analysis of architectural features and decorative motifs in ancient monuments.

Second is the figure of the "architect" itself that animates temple designs as well as their historical evolution. Hardy uses "architect" as a shifting signifier for the expressive quality of a temple as well

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as the historical evolution of monuments, so that the entire six hundred-year history of temple architecture in Karnataka can be conflated with the design of any single monument within that history. Deployed in such a way, the term "architect" no longer remains a historical category, but instead becomes a transcendental principle, representing the intellectual contours that the scholar himself has created, and yet allowing the critic access to the intellectual life of the makers within a specific historical period or culture.

This kind of formal history and the access it allowed into the minds of the architects can be related to a variant of formalism that developed in early twentieth century in the English Aesthetic Movement, and in particular the writings of the art critic, Roger Fry. As Christopher Reed has pointed out, Fry's art criticism was originally inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement in nineteenth century England, but Fry synthesised that movement's interests in pre-modern and non-modern decorative designs with the decorative interests in modernist paintings.[13] Fry read in these decorative interests the intellectual contours of an artistic genius deriving from a romantic, modernist art movement, as opposed to the skill of an artisan and its social purpose within the Arts and Crafts movement. In his essay, "Artist as Decorator", published in 1917, Fry gave artists a status superior to other members of the human race, claiming that they use their intellect and vision to see, think, and act in specific ways that are quite removed from questions of mundane life.[14] In "Art and Life", Fry argued that the cycles of art and history are "in the main self-contained," with stylistic evolution in art "determined much more by its own internal forces" rather than narrative subject-matter and social purpose.[15] We can see emerging in these statements the contours of formalism, whereby visual form becomes detached from narrative content, and is controlled only by its own inner motives and impulses. The category "artist" becomes for Fry the signifier of that intellectual and psychological life embedded in the visual arts.

This animistic conception of form is reflected in Hardy's study of Indian temple architecture. Hardy also comes strikingly close to Fry in arguing that "At the level of form, not content, cultural distance is not prohibitive."[16] Fry had demonstrated this crucial insight of formalism in a series of essays published in 1939 as his "Last Lectures."[17] In that series, Fry developed a new history of world art, including non-western and non-modern art, such as Egyptian, African, Chinese, and Indian, for the benefit of readers who may have visited public collections of world art such as the British Museum. Within the comparative framework of his "Last Lectures," Fry assured his readers that an insight into formal preoccupations of various far-away cultures offered a way of understanding the inner workings of the minds of those people without having to know the culturally specific meanings implied in their obscure iconography and narrative content.

This approach to world art may be called the panopticon of formalism. Hardy quite directly participates in Fry's panopticon by arguing for the way visual form could allow easy, unmediated access to the intellectual life of historically and culturally distant subjects. Only that Fry uses formalism to represent national aesthetics of various non-western cultures, whereas Hardy defines traditions

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of sacred architecture in India through long evolutions. The totalizing impulse of formalist criticism is implicit in both critics. Fry's category of "artist" controls and relativizes world culture within an encyclopedic framework of art history. Hardy's "architect," when deployed as a Protean intellect motivating single temples as well as evolutionary trends, controls the place of each temple within a theoretically extendible series of all regional architecture of ancient India.

Hardy's approach to India has gained meaningfulness at the confluence of theoretical and practical interests in England as well as India. A practicing architect himself, Hardy has founded an institution at De Montfort University in Leicester, England, where architects are encouraged to include in their own work principles of Indian temple architecture. Hardy's interest in the practical application of his theory comes close to Fry's motivation in 1913 to found the Omega Workshop, where members could integrate modernist principles with contemporary design practices. Only that Hardy's practical training is based on archaeological evidence from ancient India. Within a late twentieth century interest in regionalism, where world cultures become available for appropriation within contemporary architectural practice, Hardy's work gains the status of historical knowledge.[18]

Hardy's architectural history has also gained institutional currency in India. His essay in the *JSAH* is part of a large study that was published by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi,[19] a government-funded agency whose mission had been to document and analyze textual and artistic practices in ancient India by sponsoring projects relating to India's sacred art, translating texts, publishing volumes of annotated glossaries relating to artistic practices, as well as organizing international conferences on such cosmological concepts as Time and Space in various cultures.[20] Hardy actively relates his study to this expansive, intellectualist project of the IGNCA by claiming that "such analogies can be drawn between the patterns of form and metaphysical ideas about manifestation, recurrent in Indian thought, that these ideas can be said to be embodied in the forms."[21] In summary, therefore, I want to suggest that Hardy's encyclopedic work on Karnataka temples becomes historical knowledge through a specific conjuncture in historiography, namely, that of a Fry-like aesthetic panopticon, a post modern interest in regionalism, and a neo-traditionalist desire for intellectual legitimacy for India's traditional arts.

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3. Adam Hardy, 'Tradition and Transformation: Continuity and Ingenuity in the Temples of Karnataka', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 60, no. 2, June 2001, pp. 180-99.
4. This aspect of Karnataka temples is demonstrated in M.A. Dhaky, *The Indian Temple Forms in Karnata*

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*Inscriptions and Architecture*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, pp. 26-28.

5. Examples of this elaboration can be seen in the Kāśīviśvesvara Temple at Lakkuṇḍī, *c.* AD 1075, and in many temples thereafter. See Sinha, *op. cit.*
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8. Lionel D. Barnett, 'Inscriptions of Sudi', *Epigraphia Indica* 15 (1919-20): pp. 85-94, especially lines 29-30.
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# 14

# Guilds as Determinants of Style: Shamalaji Sculptures

*Abha Sheth*

Towards the close of fifth century AD Bhaṭṭāraka a Gupta general of the Maitraka clan and the governor of the present-day region of Saurastra (present Kathiawad) peninsula in the Gujarat State, founded the kingdom of Vallabhi.[1] Like many other coeval principalities, Maitrakas of Vallabhi in this part of western India too started their career as Gupta feudatories and were soon to become powerful and independent by first quarter of sixth century AD, once the latter's decline was anticipated.

Earlier to this it was in fourth century AD, when Gupta dynasty had risen to power following the decline of Kuṣāṇas. At its peak of glory in fifth century AD, it held sway over a large realm comprising of varied cultural pockets. Not to be despised is the fact that in past these cultural pockets had passed under the rule of Mauryans, Śuṅgas, Sātavāhanas, Ikṣvākus, Kṣatrapas and Kuṣāṇas, thereby already establishing distinct regional art styles.

Maitrakas establishing their suzerainty in west after the break-up of the imperial power of Gupta empire, which coincided with many other states coming into prominence. Chiefs among them were ruled by the like such as Pallavas, Gurjaras, Cālukyas, Kalacūris, and Maukharīs. This shift from centralised imperial power to regional power centres was accompanied by regionalism in art too, which usually is traced from this period on.

As pointed by Joanna Williams[2] it was during this span when regionalism became more apparent in artistic activity, especially in sculptural imagery. This was due to the popularity of temple architecture at pan-Indian level and in its wake the calling for more sculptures. Also to accredit is the direct royal patronage of the regional dynasties and favourable social, religious and economic factors prevalent in their domain, on account of which varied regions emerged as centres of sculptural activity all over Indian subcontinent.

But then regionalism is not a concept just to be associated to the period of Gupta aftermath, as local features were apparent in sculpture all along the pre-Gupta phase too.[3] Even Gupta style in art was not identical in each region of its political extent. Such being the case it is least surprising to find in a single unifying stylistic idiom enough space for the regional variations. Despite these variations

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of pre-Gupta phase, what is true is that stylistic lingua of each province became quite distinctly noticeable only after sixth century AD, whereby the look of a monument or a sculpture was enough to identify the particular regional school.

This pluralism of regional styles in post-Gupta phase have always been accredited to Gupta style, but not to forget, number of regional styles had already existed in areas to which Gupta dynasty extended its power in fourth century AD.

**Regional School of North Gujarat and South-west Rajasthan**

The regional school of western India too came into existence in fifth century AD with most of the sites concentrating in present-day Gujarat and Rajasthan. Herewith, it is important to take into consideration the ancient names of territories of which all these sites were once a part.

From ancient times the present province of Gujarat and Rajasthan consisted of essentially three main defined divisions — Lāṭa, Ānartta and Saurashtra. Lāṭa is southern Gujarat from Mahi river till the Tapti. Ānartta seems to have been northern Gujarat with its capital Anandapura, the modern Vadnagara city, and Saurashtra — the land of Sus — afterwards Sanskritised into Saurastra — the goodly land — consisted of the southern part of present Kathiawad.

The beginning of sculptural activity in these regions, which indeed was sporadic and inconsistent, can be pushed back to third-second century BC.[4] By fifth, sixth and seventh century AD — specifically in the Gupta aftermath — the pace of this activity had gradually increased, whereby innumerable sites spurted in the area best corresponding to the Ānartta belt — the region of present north Gujarat and south-west Rajasthan. These sites are Shamalaji, Devnimori, Kotyarka, Vartol, Thanesara, Gadha, Bhinmal, Amjhara, Roda, Tintoi, Kalyanpura, Jagat, Kejada, Koteshvara, Devangana, Tarsang, Mataria, Vadnagar, Vadaval, Malagaon, Anadra and Varaman.

There are good reasons to view the Ānartta belt as a unified religio-cultural entity, distinct from other regions, as majority of sculptural finds consist predominantly of *Mātṛkā* figures together with images of Śiva, Skanda and Gaṇeśa. Even the stone type favoured by sculptors blue grey schist, (locally called *pareva*) the source of which must have been Dungarpur in Rajasthan, is common for the majority of sculptures. Thus this geographic zone, i.e., Ānartta, besides being an artistic centre must have been the religious, political and economic kernel too.

Interestingly, all these sculptures from Ānartta are presently in museums[5] as isolated pieces, thus far removed from their original context.[6] This complicates the procedure of their interpretation and inferring meanings regarding their role in a given time and place ambience. In addition, this inquest further gets complicated with the non-availability of epigraphic and literary evidences to assist the dating of sculptures and fixing an inter-regional chronological pattern. It is also remarkable that, at no point in the early history of western India was this region, directly under a powerful

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ruling house and thus accessible to its patronage. Dynastic authority over this part shifted with significant frequency, which pertains during the fifth through the tenth century AD.[7]

Therefore, it was the paucity of inscriptions and dated examples of sculptures from the concerned vicinity, a hurdle in fixing up the chronology, which led to a scholarship mainly focusing on the issues of assigning dates, fixing chronological phases and identifying patrons through iconographical and stylistic studies. The conclusions were achieved through stylistic analyzes and comparisons among the sites inside the concerned region as well as with the dated sites lying outside.

With all other "tools" turning handicapped in the absence of inscriptions style and iconography remained the only "tools" to study this isolated sculptural wealth. It is for this reason that a great disparity in opinions regarding the possible date bracket, chronological sequence and the historical and political context exists among scholars.

Shamalaji[8] was one among these sites and considering the extant available art, it might have been a major influential sculptural centre, if not the fountainhead. The large hoard of sculptures with Śaiva affiliation, discovered in 1934 by P.A. Inamdar[9] at this site, leads to an assumption of its being a major pilgrimage centre — also discernible in its strategic position in past on an ancient highway.[10] With sculptures still being discovered, the dimensions of the site's role in the interregional art activity becomes interesting and worth elaborating. It is also tempting to define the role Shamalaji site might have played in the artistic, social, political and religious scenario of fifth/sixth/seventh and eighth century AD.

As mentioned ahead, what is perplexing rather fascinating is the existence of many sculptural centres besides Shamalaji, in the concerned geographical space. The sculptures from all these sites — mostly *Mātṛkā*s — though follow a single idiom; they do differ stylistically as well as iconographically among themselves. In such a case would it be quite simplistic to assign the variant styles to different guilds, existing and working in close proximity to each other at each site.

An enigma remains as to for whom suddenly all these Śaiva affiliated sculptures were being produced? Whether the local population was the "consumer" or the Śaiva devotees in general? Why is it that a particular icon keeps changing its form and content at each site? There is also an enigma as to who is the authority determining what and how an icon has to be made. Is this the patron or an agency independent of the ruling house? In that case what role does an artist/sculptor exercise as a determinant and where does he feature in the entire hierarchical system prevalent in a guild? In this working paper an attempt has been made to enquire and understand these issues by focusing on Shamalaji site as a case study and also to what extent guilds and their working methodology are responsible for the formulation of a particular stylistic idiom.

## Artist's Organization: Guilds

At this juncture before moving further, it is inevitable to elaborate on guilds and their working

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methodologies — as discernible through literary and textual evidences. A major work in this direction of collecting evidence regarding the existence, function and organization of artists in ancient India is that of R.N. Misra.[11] Though regarding the inscriptional evidences he says,

> As the inscriptions relate to the actual activity, and texts offer evidence mostly on the theoretical aspects, the former should be taken as more important in defining the practical aspects of the ancient art activity.

He further adds,

> there remains a hiatus between the information as gleaned from the epigraphs on the one hand and the texts on the other, in respect of different types of artisans, their role and the work charge.[12]

Certain conclusions and concerns of his study of ancient artists and their organization have been surmised in the following paragraphs.

The word *śilpa* in early times had a wide connotation including within its ambit various crafts and occupations — thus covering diverse art activities that required skills in their practice. A greater degree of economic activity brought growth in the number of crafts as well as their practitioners in the post-Vedic period. As R.N. Misra rightly puts "In a growing society, the artisans had enormous utility and various *śilpa*s had special roles in the growth of economy as well as in the urban patterns of life."[13]

Epigraphic references to workers-in-stone, during the pre-Mauryan period are very scarce, but positive evidence regarding them are available from the Mauryan period on. Unlike other craftsmen, at an early juncture, sculptors and architects didn't have better guild organizations. This probably was due to their physical mobility from one region to another — the reason why they do not get an adequate mention in inscriptions too. But with changing political and social structures and with acceleration in the tempo of art activity during Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods, a fair amount of information about these artisans and their role in the realm of art is available through inscriptional evidences.

Gradually there emerged some sort of organization of the sculptors and architects, which probably included both the resident and the itinerant artists. R.N. Misra states

> The localization of activity at different centres such as Mathura and Sanchi, may indicate the existence of resident artists and such artists may ultimately have led to the organization of the kindred group on a more efficient basis, even as the itinerant artists may have helped in the dissemination of the art-idiom. The epigraphical data suggests that such classes of artists working in stone had come into existence by the second century BC.[14]

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The interesting and relevant information at this juncture is that in spite of their physical mobility the artists maintained their associations with their places of origin. For example, an artist trained in Mathura "school" would remain faithful to it, even when working at a different region. Even Taranāth, the sixteenth-century Tibetan historian of Buddhism, had laid great stress on the schools of art which according to him, developed in different regions through the efforts of various individual artists. He too adds that the artists belonging to such schools were known after the schools themselves, irrespective of their places of operation or of birth; thus stating their loyalties to the schools.

In the post-Gupta period a new class of artists emerged, i.e., *sūtradhāra*, one who had the requisite qualification for the job by his knowledge of the theory of craft. With the growth of different classes of artists, there came into existence some sort of a hierarchical scheme, where *sūtradhāra* amongst the artisans figured at the top — followed by such categories of artists and workmen (in sculpture and architecture) as *vijñānin, śilpī, rūpakāra* and *karmin*.

Due to his proficiency in *śāstra*s and *vidyās* he also came in close relation to the ruling class — the elite. Certain later epigraphic evidences refer to "king's own *sūtradhāra*" signifying a very special status of his, which brought him quite close to the ruling class or to the upper strata of the society. Who played an influential and decisive role — patron or the *sūtradhāra*? What were the criteria behind the choice of a particular guild — their popularity or their descent from a famous art tradition/ school? *Sūtradhāra*'s relation on one hand to the ruler and on the other to the artist's community — *goṣṭhī* — must have played a pivotal role. Therefore along with the artists and their organization's physical mobility even *sūtradhāra*'s individual mobility would have to be considered.

As often inferred from the epigraphic references the profession of sculptors and architects was hereditary, where the same craft was practised in one family for more than two generations — thus indicating a trend towards specialization. It was probably existence of such communities of sculptors in different regions, which were the deciding factors behind different nuances and modes of stylistic expressions.

A strict sectarianism was not the goal of the professional practitioner of *śilpa*, i.e., it is very much possible that the same set of artists were commissioned to create the stone work related to different sects, wherein the idiom practised hardly differed. For example at Shamalaji, sculptures of many Viṣṇu Viśvarūpas, considered as part of the latest art activity at the site, are not carved in a different idiom instead carries the earlier style — when already in neighbouring regions a variant style was practised. Does it suggest the cultic shifts do not necessarily bring along stylistic shifts? As in case of Shamalaji it seems a single guild or family of artisans with the same *sūtradhāra* might have been the decisive voice behind the art activity at a later juncture too.

In a *goṣṭhī*, i.e., guild with increasing experience, probably the artist's status also tended to rise, resulting in the craftsman's hierarchical upward mobility in the order starting from a sculptor to *sūtradhāra*. The different steps in his promotion with the passage of time, indicated that some norms

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probably existed to decide the artist's status as they acquired greater skills. The artist's hierarchical upward mobility within the organization with the passage of time would indicate certain norms and canons that decided their status. With a greater recognition of his merit a craftsman became a *śilpī*. On one level, these yardsticks might have differed from time to time, from guild to guild and from region to region. On the other level, in an overview of the artistic situation within the parameters of time and space these same criterions would again enable us to understand and define the aesthetics of artists, of a certain region and that of a patron. Is it that the aesthetics of a given time and space is formulated by the popularity of a certain stylistic school or is it formulated due to the specific role a patron impersonates.

**Case Study of Shamalaji**

By second century AD distinct idioms in the field of sculpture had come into existence in different regions at pan-Indian level, multiplying further with the passage of time. Why is it that each region, each site has a distinct sculptural idiom of its own? No critical engagement ponders on the factors that accounted for such a diversification. A mere comparative study of art forms and motifs in the same or different regions for fixing chronological sequence tends to ignore the factor instrumental for their existence — the practitioners — sculptors. What is the artist's precise contribution? To which class of the society did they belong? And had it any implications on the work of art he produced? After all it is his community's mobility, skill and acculturation to particular schools of *śilpa*, which would define the nature of resultant style in a particular realm.

Going back to the earlier assumption of the visible multifarious styles in the Ānartta region, being the result of different guilds or artisan's family residing and working at each site simultaneously or with hardly any time gap separating them. Thus in neither of these cases time gap is responsible for stylistic and iconographic changes. Needless to say at this juncture an elaboration is needed as to why does stylistic lingua of each site in so close a proximity to each other differs? Here there are two possibilities.

Either the advent and growth of distinctive styles and their different strains was the result of interaction of the canons of art and their practitioners where they were in communication with each other exchanging ideas — thus related yet not jarringly different. Since stylistic schools or idioms were the domain of a single family or a community of artisans, there would have been many such communities operating side by side, simultaneously. On a more formal basis contiguous styles in the regions of their operation would be explainable through similar proximity prevalent among the guilds. Or all of them descended from a common body, which again was their continuous referential source. It is possible both these cases were prevalent simultaneously and had an equal share of contribution.

As mentioned above there is a striking unity of style as well as iconography within the Ānartta geographical sphere, with preponderance of Śaiva affiliated sculptures — specifically *Mātṛkas*. As a

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major sculptural hoard hails from Shamalaji, it seems to have played an influential role in disseminating a particular stylistic idiom. This not only predates the site but also all the other strains visible in the adjoining regions are cognate to the one at Shamalaji. If this is the case then Shamalaji is the common source, from where the style travels to another site and alters within a certain framework, not only on stylistic grounds but also on iconographical grounds.

Representations of *Mātṛkā*s at Shamalaji and other related sites in this part of western India have a lot of disparity amongst them. They are portrayed either seated or standing, with children or not. Some hold attributes and have distinguishing animal *vāhana*s, others do not. Either Śiva and Gaṇeśa accompany them or Skanda. As Sara L. Schastok says, "large number of clearly similar but never quite identical images has puzzled scholars."[15]

There are not only stylistic but also iconographic variations both within a site as well as among the images from various sites. So many enigmatic images which due to certain unusual features, complicating their iconographic and religious meanings, even at this juncture remain unexplainable. For example, Cāmuṇḍā *Mātṛkā* at Shamalaji as well as Tintoi has been represented both as an attractive, youthful and beautiful female (*Pl.* 48) and at a later juncture at the same site she is shown in an emaciated, ferocious form (*Pl.* 49). An uncommon vehicle for Cāmuṇḍā, jackal or *śṛgāla* is also depicted beside her.

To explain the meaning behind the youthful depiction of usually Ugra-Cāmuṇḍā, Sara Schastok quotes a passage from *Mahābhārata*'s *Śalya Parva*, which mentions a band of 192 *Mātṛkā*s who were following Skanda. While some are described as having long stomachs, ears or breasts, the text also says, "Of straight forms and sweet features, all of them, endowed with youth, were decked with ornaments — of charming and delightful features, they were beautiful like Asuras."[16] In such circumstances either the guild working at Shamalaji and Tintoi were aware of above-mentioned textual descriptions, or instructions were given to them by the *sūtradhāra*, who in this case seems to be aware of the mythological developments going on. Somebody like him, who is quite close to and cognizant of the changes happening in the Śaivite pantheon and in the Śaivite myths, could only be the guide of artisan's community — through whom there is a constant feeding from another "source."

Equally perplexing is the *Mātṛkā* shown pot-bellied (or is she pregnant) holding *śakti* identified as Cāmuṇḍā[17] — found both from Shamalaji as well as Thanesara. (*Pl.* 50) These images are the special feature of the concerned region in western India. Either, as explained by scholars, the iconography is still being formulated, the mythological background is constantly developing. The changes were incorporated or made familiar to the artisans by the *sūtradhāra*. Or another conjecture is these features were the results of the amalgamation of dormant, local and resident factors with that of canonized mainstream Brahminical itinerant ones.

This could be said beholding the popularity of Devi cult in India and especially in this part of western India — evident through various names under which she is worshipped. On pan-Indian

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level, Brahminical cult specifically Śaiva myths at this juncture were still being redefined and formulated — leaving enough space for many local features to amalgamate. Eventually with the passage of time these local features, mirror of local beliefs, customs and traditions, lost their original context and meaning, as they could not gain acceptance and popularity outside a particular realm. Is it not possible, Cāmuṇḍā's depiction as a beautiful woman with jackal and the *Mātṛkā* as a pregnant woman emphasising both her maternal as well as ferocious aspects, were the influences of local culture and not of the strict Brahminical ones? Thus what survived were the more popular mainstream Brahminical features, easily graspable due to the commonality they share with other images on pan-Indian level — making the local and resident features decontextualised.

The local culture of the concerned domain must have been decisive in the stylistic lingua too. And it is here that the concept of two categories of artists — resident and itinerant, would have played a major role. As pointed earlier Shamalaji might have been the common stylistic source for majority of the neighbouring sites. The stylistic as well as iconographic factors spread from Shamalaji due to itinerant factors and once mixed with the resident local ones resulted into stylistically and thematically variant images at each site. It was the demand of sculptures and monuments with increasing patronage that led to innumerable sculptural centres with different styles existing simultaneously. Thus it is impossible to decontextualise the stylistic idiom from its locale, and transform it into an abstract "tool" that develops from a formative, immature phase in a certain region to a mature one in another — irrespective of the factors responsible for it. Instead the attempt here is to use the stylistic "tool" in a more rational manner.

Similar type of module works even in the case of Shamalaji idiom being similar to the contemporaneous sites lying outside the concerned vicinity, like at Mandsor, Parel, Jogeswari, Mansar and Elephanta. It is no coincidence that all these sites again have a strong Śaiva affiliation. In spite of similarities, all these sites do have different dialects and it is here that the geographical positioning of Shamalaji site in the Ānartta belt of western India played a prominent role. How?

As mentioned earlier, sporadic art activity is evident in whole of present Gujarat, during the rule of western Kṣatrapas in the first four centuries of the Christian era. As not much physical material of second-third centuries AD is available, the discovery of Devnimorī *stūpa* was quite significant. With a strong Gandharan inclination, visible in the architecture and the Buddha sculptures, it laid certain stylistic straits which were later picked up by the *Mātṛkā* sculptures of Thanesara Mahadeva (*Pl.* 51) — identified as Kṛttikās and carrying strong Bactro-Gāndhāran elements. These same traits were the invisible, dormant and decisive factors in the formulation of Shamalaji idiom. As a result, though Shamalaji idiom seems cognate to Parel and Mandasor it is quite ornate and sophisticated with exaggerated postures, heavily folded drapery and elaborate ornamentation (*Pls.* 52 & 53).

These stylistically related sites with strong Śaiva affiliation hint to the region being the centre of

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a particular sect or an important Śaivite pilgrimage centre. Again these sites seems to have favoured by a certain patron whose personal choices and inclinations guided or were guided by a *sūtradhāra* — head of the artists' community. This same agency decided the guild which in case of Shamalaji had a strong connection to Madhyadeśa as well as Vidarbha region as it seems to have descended from an earlier generation of styles visible at Udaigiri cave 6, Eran, Badoh Pathari and even Deogarh. These lineaments in turn owed a lot to and seem to have descended from Kuṣāṇa-Mathura school.

Thus the organization of artists, their role in the formulation and dissemination of styles, role of the head of a certain guild as well as that of the individual artist, nature of patronage, etc., possibly would enable further investigation. After all it is the practice that determines the style and so the very inquiry into it.

## References

1. Present name of Vallabhī is Vala or Valeh. Maitrakas (also known as Valabhīs) chose it as their capital probably due to its being a harbor on the Bhāvnagar creek. Very soon it became a famous seat of learning, rivaling in its fame the Nalanda University of Eastern India. Vallabhīpura seems to have fallen to ruins after the attack of Arabs, who also deposed Śilāditya VII (Maitraka king), around AD 788/789 according to H.G. Shastri.
2. Joanna Williams, *The art of Gupta India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982, p. 174. She points out that how after AD 550 the pace of regional differentiation quickened.
3. In pre-Gupta phase Mathura, Vidisha, Krishna-Valley, Gāndhāra and western India emerged as thriving art centres.

   The aspect of Gupta domination and the concept of regional genres is discussed by Ratan Parimoo in the essay 'The myth of Gupta classicism and the concept of regional genres', *Essays on New Art History: Studies in Indian sculpture — Genres and interpretations*, Books and Books, New Delhi, 2000.
4. Many Buddhist caves have been discovered in Saurastra like Uparkot, Taranga, Bawa Pyara Math and Khambalida. Scholars differ largely regarding the period of these monuments, on account of which their date ranges in between second century BC and second century AD.
5. Majority of the sculptures are in the Baroda Musuem and the Picture Gallery.
6. It seems that the temples, of which these stone sculptures possibly were once an integral part in the early phase, were constructed of brick rather than stone — which became popular as a construction medium only.
7. After the fall of Maitraka dynasty this region witnessed for brief period the rules of Gurjara-Pratihāras of Mālwā and Kanauj, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Cālukyas, and Chavadas.
8. Though initially a Śaivite site as evident from extant images, Shamalaji at later juncture is dominated by Vaiṣṇavism, as proven by the latest images — a series of Viṣṇu Viśvarūpas. Even the present shrine of Shamalaji is dedicated to Viṣṇu and is a mediaeval one, dating possibly from fifteenth-sixteenth century AD. The village too derives its name from this god, for Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa is black — Śyāmala. U.P. Shah, *Sculptures from Shamalaji and Roda*, Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda, 1960.
9. P.A. Inamdar, *Some Archaeological finds in the Idar State*, Department of Archaeology, Idar state, Himmatnagar, 1936.
10. Even today there are several places of pilgrimage in this territory besides Shamalaji, like Idar, Khed-

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Brahma, Derol, Bhavanāth, Bhiloda, Harsol, Modasa, Vadali, etc. U.P. Shah, *Sculptures from Shamalaji and Roda*, 1960.

11. R.N. Misra, *Ancient Artists and Art Activity*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1975.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
13. R.N. Misra, p. 6.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
15. Sara L. Schastok, *The Shamalaji sculptures and 6th century art in Western India*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1985, p. 72.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
17. Shivaji K. Panikkar, *Saptamātṛkā : Worship and Sculptures — An Iconological Interpretation of Conflicts and Resolutions in the Storied Brahminical Icons*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 82-83.

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15

# Intertextuality, Authorship and the Conundrum of Interpretation in the Sūrsāgar Paintings of Mewar

*Rita Sodha*

The *Sūrsāgar* paintings of the Mewar School are a set of works, illustrating the verses/text of the *aṣṭachāpa* poet Surdas of the Vallabhacharya cult. Surdas was born at Sihi village,[1] south of Delhi in AD 1479. He was the fourth son born in the house of a poor Sarasvat Brahmana. He was blind from birth. He left his home when he was quite young following an accusation of theft by his parents. Surdas was living at Gaughat when one day, Vallabhacharya arrived from Adela to Braj. Surdas, who by then had followers of his own owing to his poetic renditions, beautiful voice and skill in musical matters went with his followers to have *darśana* of Vallabhacharya.

Vallabhacharya asked him to describe some of the glory of *Bhagvān* and Surdas sang *padas* in which he humbled himself as a lowly sinner before Kṛṣṇa. When Vallabhacharya heard these *padas*, he asked Surdas why he had depreciated himself so much and asked him to describe something of the *līlā* of *Bhagvān* instead. Surdas, however, remarked that he knew nothing about the *līlā* of *Bhagvān*. Vallabhacharya then told the divine name (*brahmasambandha*) to Surdas and had him dedicate himself to Kṛṣṇa. After Surdas had thus been initiated into the *sampradāya* in AD 1511, Vallabhacharya recited the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, daśam skandha* to him. It is common belief that after Vallabhacharya had imparted the knowledge of the entire Subodhinī to Surdas, he was able to describe the glory of the *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa. Surdas's *padas* immensely pleased Vallabhacharya and he asked Surdas to go to Mount Govardhana and sing *kīrtanas* to Govardhanānāthjī (often called Śrī Nāthjī). Surdas composed and sang *kīrtanas* as part of *sevā* for various *darśanas* from *maṅgala* to *śayana*.

The *Sūrsāgar* is a huge collection of *padas* attributed to Surdas; it is a part of Surdas's *sevā* to Kṛṣṇa. It is believed that Vallabhacharya used to address Surdas as *Sūrsāgar* as he had composed innumerable *padas* describing the divine *līlā*. Surdas is believed to have died in AD 1584 at a place called Parasoli.

Mewar with its capital at Udaipur, in the seventeenth century had become the melting pot of *bhakti* and the Vallabhacharya sect.

Rana Jagat Singh I (AD 1628-52) of Udaipur, *Vīra Vinoda*[2] informs had been a vowed patron of

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religious pursuits. After 1648 AD, he seems to have got religiously inclined and had taken up pilgrimages to various places. Amongst his many pilgrimages he also visited Gokul.[3] He also took *dīkṣā* from Girdharji I, who was the great grandson of Vitthalnathji (Vallabhacharya's son). Rāṇā Jagat Singh I had thus, formally got initiated into the Puṣṭimārga cult of Vallabhacharya. As a result of the *dīkṣā* and initiation into the cult, the Rāṇā had gifted the village of Asotia near Kankroli to Girdharji I, who had become the *tilakayat* in AD 1606. Girdharji belonged to the *tṛtīya gṛha* (third house) which is now in Kankroli. In AD 1582 Vitthalnathji had divided his property which also included the seven *nidhi svarūpa*s amongst his seven sons. All these *nidhi svarūpa*s had remained in Gokul and in Jatipura all through the lifetime of Viṭṭhalnāthjī and for sometime even after his death. It was only during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) and out of his fear during the last three decades of the seventeenth century, that these *nidhi svarūpas* were moved away from Gokul and Mathura region and carried away surreptitiously to various regions in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Consequently, three of the nine *nidhi svarūpa*s amongst which was also the paramount deity of Śrī Nāthjī was brought to the kingdom of Mewar seeking haven. With three significant deities of the cult in the Mewar region along with the Rāṇā's affinity to the cult, it is not surprising that the *Sūrsāgar* text was amongst others singled out to be illustrated. *Sūrsāgar* as a theme for painting in the court of Mewar seems to have been as ubiquitous and as favoured a subject as the illustrations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. To my knowledge, in no other court and school than Mewar, has the text of *Sūrsāgar* been illustrated and that too, consistently, over a period of time (there are three sets of *Sūrsāgar* paintings).[4] The cultural politics of the region played a central role in *Sūrsāgar* being chosen for illustration, for it can be fairly assumed that the devotees/people were veritably acquainted with the text which was largely an oral tradition with attempts of recording and writing down the manuscript already in progress.

In my doctoral thesis on the interpretation of the *Sūrsāgar* text and paintings of the Mewar school, I have examined and analyzed these paintings from various positions with respect to its patronage and cult affiliation, decoding and deciphering the written pictures, exploring the visual lexicon of the artist and correlating the *Sūrsāgar* verses and paintings to the *haveli* ritual and music. The entire production/creation being a well co-ordinated programme, an enigma remains as to who were the audience to these paintings. Audience being the "cultural consumer" without whom the act of reception of the "cultural product" would be incomplete.[5] Was it the patron, the devotees of the cult, the patron-devotee, none of them or all of them? Or did the entire activity of commissioning fall within the socio-political agenda of the patron? Which were the mediating agencies instrumental in the production of such a socio-cultural art? Presuming that the patron provided the means, the economic and remunerative set-up for the production (creation) of such art, was he physically selecting the text and designating the work to artists? Or was he merely financing the project which doubtlessly fell within the purview of his cultural and political programme.

Since *Sūrsāgar* had been an oral tradition which was being recorded in the late sixteenth and

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seventeenth century one finds three *Sūrsāgar* manuscripts being written and recorded in the Mewar Court. Invariably, one of these three manuscripts is the source of text for the paintings. On that account, one sees an intervention, that of the "manuscript recorder" who at the outset filters the body of text/verses, permitting few out of the many to go into the manuscript. The discretion could have been grounded upon the elements of novelty, popularity, relevance, significance and ritualistic association of the text/verses to the *haveli* and the devotees.

I have noticed that the entire manuscript is not painted. Thus, yet another agency comes into the scene — the librarian or the authority who determines the verses from the manuscript to be illustrated. Furthermore, another stage of predilection prevails; few verses out of the already screened text are singled out to be painted. The unknown authority could also have been the patron himself for reasons already mentioned. It remains to be seen whether the artist had a role to play in the selection of the text or was he merely implementing and executing the desired text. Seeing that all these paintings and most of the other miniature paintings have a text superscribed, I also wonder where the scribe (who inscribed the text on the painting) features in the entire hierarchy of the methodical programme. Would he have been the same person as the one who chose the text for the written manuscript and recorded it? If so, he is playing a crucial role in the entire production of miniature paintings as it is his subjective individuality and perception (personal preference) in keeping with the socio-political and cultural patterns, which is being imbibed and reflected.

In this working paper, I set out to enquire and interrogate the circumstances, determinants, components and considerations encompassing the praxis of miniature paintings focusing attention on *Sūrsāgar* paintings as a case study. With literary texts being the source for a greater corpus of miniature paintings the aspect of "authorship" needs to be re-examined as instead of a single author, there are two authors in picture (author of the text, the poet and the author of the painting, the artist). Furthermore, instead of one reader, there are two readers; the first reader of the text, i.e., the artist and secondly the reader of the painting, i.e., the audience. Additionally, the cognitive and cerebral process of reading and interpreting becomes more complex and intricate considering the arbitration of the varied agencies as discussed earlier.

The written text itself has a latent content, i.e., a scope for multiple interpretation. Texts contain and express meanings beyond the intended and conscious meaning of their authors. It would be the artist's moral concern to unravel and understand the suggested meaning and convey its equivalent through his imagerial vocabulary as that was the whole purpose of a manuscript illustration. This practice provokes yet another enquiry — whether the artist was not only a literate but an educated, enlightened and knowledgeable individual who possessed the acumen to grapple with the complexities posed by the text-poetry and envision its pictorial counterpart. Or was he simply implementing the content through expression which was uncovered and prompted by an independent erudite agency?

In my opinion, the entire exercise of reading and interpretation in miniature paintings is

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inextricably mediated, irrevocably convoluted and dense. The creation and the productive activity of artists is limited and mediated by conditions of their artistic practice. The structural conditions of artistic practice offer serious challenge to the traditional notion of "authorship."[6] I have observed while studying the *Sūrsāgar* paintings that the artist has either completely adhered to the superscribed text or he has digressed. When he deflects, he is either supplementing the text or he focuses and cynosures on a section of it and magnifies it into a painting. In view of such a phenomenon, who does one ascribe the nature and prerogative of authorship to? For, one cannot pinpoint as to which prodigy or whose intellect is reading, interpreting, segregating and selecting portions of the text and designing the painting. In light of the above argument, the question of authorship and artist's autonomy invariably comes into the picture and the dominance of the author/artist is questioned as one recognizes that the art of miniature painting is collectively produced.

The ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, etc., expressed in such social and cultural products as the *Sūrsāgar* paintings are reflective of the culture/society and the preferences of the ruling class, the people/subjects/devotees, religion, expectations, etc.

Looking at the complex and circuitous nature of the production of the miniature paintings and especially the *Sūrsāgar* paintings, I would like to examine and explore the notions of intertextuality, authorship, reading and interpretation. Barthes says,

> . . . a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety writings, none of them original, blend and clash.[7]

The *Sūrsāgar* text being allegorical, metaphorical, analogical and figurative in nature divulges more than one meaning. There are plural readings of the text-verse itself; one being the apparent — superficial reading and the other being the latent, doctrinal and camouflaged reading/interpretation. Barthes further says that,

> the text is made of multiple writings . . . entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation but there is one place where this multiplicity becomes focused and that place is the reader. . . .[8]

In case of the *Sūrsāgar* paintings the reader is the artist who unravels the "multiplicity" of meaning in the first stage of perception from the text/verse and conceives the painting. The audience forms the second reader who scrutinizes and evokes the once unravelled but ensconced meaning/reading/interpretation. The riddle intensifies when one comes across more than one painterly expressions/interpretations of the same text-verse. Inferring that on the most part the text-verse (*Sūrsāgar*) possesses the potential of projecting plural readings in its equivalent, pictorial counterpart, how does one tackle the presence and production of a second pictorial counterpart, which is not a duplication of the first, but a variant? If the first painting is considered a synonym of the text-verse, the second

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becomes a synonym of a synonym. In this entire cognitive process the audiences and readers are reading and interpreting what is once already read by the artist from the poets' text. Thus, our reading/interpretation is actually a re-reading and reinterpretation.

Even though the original (poet's) meaning is lost and inaccessible to the reader-audience, the source (text) from which the meaning was drawn and derived by the artist is available and accessible, because the text/verse is superscribed on the painting. As a result, the text and the painting co-exist in time, one haunting the other for a valid if not the only and correct interpretation to be elicited.

For this reason, the notion of the "death of the author" is not very relevant and applicable in the study of meanings in the miniature paintings. The author cannot cease to exist as the idioms and paradigms of expression that he employs need to be re-interpreted in his own social and stylistic lineage to enable the reader to decipher the meaning of the text (verse and painting). Instead Wolff[9] employs the phrase "dialogue with the author." The reader/audience while reading the painting is in confabulation with the two authors — the poet of the text and the artist of the painting while attempting to arrive at an interpretation which could be defined as "provisional" and "situationally specific." This leaves scope for an alternative reading. There can neither be an "only and correct interpretation" nor the possibilities of infinite meanings in a text. Though the text is presumed to bear complex and dense systems of meanings permeated by connotations and significations there can utmost be a possibility of a "valid interpretation" or a "total meaning" which is almost always an amalgamation of several contributory meanings. To engage with that too, the reader needs to be familiar with the genre of expression and the artist's repertoire of language.[10] Without the understanding and knowledge of the Braja-bhasha text (verses) and idioms of signification and communication derived by the artist, the *Sūrsāgar* paintings are conundrums.

The scope of harbouring and reading innumerable meanings in miniature paintings is minimized by the superscribed text which governs and checks the painted expression. The probable interpretations reside within the located periphery and the constraints of the text. In the process of reading and interpreting a painting, the reader/interpreter approaches the text and tries to locate its equivalent visual counterparts in the painting. After recognizing all such counter-parts he arranges them in a logical pattern corresponding to its arrangement in the text and tries to unravel the meaning. There are instances when one is either surprised or disappointed either by additional visual correspondents or a lacuna in representation. The exercise resembles a match-making process to extract a collateral-parallel meaning. Meanings are always recreated by new readers within the possibilities offered by the text. The reading sometimes (as in few of the *Sūrsāgar* paintings) becomes a completely "open" and independent one with the text merely providing a starting point from which individual significances may be allowed to flow, though prompted but unintercepted by the inscribed text.

Though literary texts contain an element of certain indeterminacy which render them slightly

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open to different readings; and also meanings/interpretations vary slightly with every reader, the priority of "authorial meaning" prevails. The reader needs to justify the presence of all visual motifs/ images and he does not enjoy the privilege to be directed entirely by his own perspectives. For one can neither overlook and obscure the presence of painted images and pictorial signs in a painting nor imagine and presume the absent ones to envisage a meaning of one's desire. The text/painting has to be viewed in its totality with its additions and negations. In other words, the authorial meaning enjoys a priority over other subsequent readings.

The artist of the *Sūrsāgar* paintings has devised various means of expressions for communicating the textual meanings, which are camouflaged. Speaking about a few, the artist aids our reading by a temporal and spatial programming of the pictorial images. The partial spaces within the frame are syntagmatically strung togather to facilitate reading. The programmed components are in correlation with the segmented spaces.

The artist sometimes chooses a temporal programming. It represents the logical order of the stringing together of narrative programmes into the axis of consecutions thus bringing about the temporal spreading out of actions as recounted. It has the effect of a chronological order. The artist at times introduces certain elements such as the figure of the king, the figure of a bridegroom, etc., providing social meanings and ideology. He profusely employs metaphoric connectors which permit the passage from an abstract isotopy to a figurative one.

Employing various devices, the artist of *Sūrsāgar* has effectively and beautifully translated the content of the text. These paintings and all the others based upon a text can be classified as "translations." Translation being the cognitive activity which brings about the text from a given utterance (text) to another utterance (painting) as equivalent.[11] To speak of meaning is both to translate and to produce signification.[12]

My concluding remarks are that for a given text in miniature paintings it does not seem that the number of possible readings can be infinite; the number is linked to the polysemic nature of the motifs, the possibilities for exploitation of which are finite in number.

The impression of the texts' "infinite openness" is often produced by partial readings. To the constraints written within the text (verse and painting both) itself, one can add others from the surrounding socio-cultural milieu and the textual competence of the reader.

In the intertextual reading such as the *Sūrsāgar* in which a text-painting is nested within a larger discourse (text-verse) disambiguization takes place. The pictorial images/motifs with reference to the text constitute a reading grid which makes the elimination of ambiguities possible. The text of *Sūrsāgar* gives rise to a prescriptive vocabulary which directs and orders the emergence and composition of motifs.

Since there is not just one single hidden meaning to be recovered and extracted in interpretation, the reader therefore fixes meaning in the act of reading. The text has suggestive meanings which are

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"silent" and not eloquent. The readers must engage with and investigate the "silences of text."[13] They must examine the empty space left by the author to uncover and reach a meaning.

The reader becomes an observer who exercises the receptive and the interpretative doing. While reading the *Sūrsāgar* paintings, the observer/reader enters into a syncretic relation with another actant of communication such as the protagonist or the narrator and receives and interprets the work. The author and the reader together in *Sūrsāgar* paintings constitute meaning, initially as poet and artist and later as artist and audience with the text as a reference point. Interpretation itself cannot be evaluated. Interpretation is not and cannot be an absolute value. To illustrate the various points I made in my paper I have chosen few paintings.

The first one is a thought provoking painting, it is a compendium, a digest of the heroism of Kṛṣṇa which were manifested in Gokul and Vrindavan (*Pl.* 54). The artist/author with pronounced autonomy has cynosured just upon one line of the *pada* and made it the theme of his painting. The latent content of a single line has been magnified to supplement and enrich the plain narrative of the *pada*. The *pada* says that the *gopī*s had gone to see baby Kṛṣṇa and they bless him saying, "Yaśodā, may your Gopāla be immortal, may he also grow up rapidly like Balarāma since he is the fortune and the heart throb of Gokul and torments the hearts of foes."[14] The artist has ingeniously deviated from the main stream depiction of depicting Kṛṣṇa crawling in the courtyard with the *gopī*s uttering phrases of joy and admiration. Instead, he has chosen the line, "He is the fortune and heart throb of Gokul, and torments the hearts of foes" of the *pada* which promised a stimulating and a thrilling picture.

The scant depiction on the top right corner of the painting is literally the verbatim visual transcript of the *pada*. Had it been enlarged, it would have filled the picture plane and suitably represented the *pada* even though rather insufficiently. Hence, instead of creating a trite work of art, the artist explored an alternative and he unfolded the essence of the *pada* in several pictorial entities. He depicts the extermination of various foes, none of which is even mentioned in the *pada*, except indirectly.

Another queer and self-invented imagery in the painting is that of a king-like figure, seated in a pavilion. There is no mention of such a figure by the poet. The artist/author in all likelihood has validly and rationally compared the duties of the king (patron and the Maharana) to the heroic deeds of Kṛṣṇa. By juxtaposing his form with the other picturisations, the artist has compared him to Kṛṣṇa, as the "dispeller of foes" and the "dear one" and "saviour" of people.

All the contrived imageries in this painting are reductive imageries or pictorial titles[15] rich in connotation and symbolized values. The artist/author has devised a paradigm to conceive both the prosaic content and the camouflaged content of the text.

The second and the third paintings are illustrations of one and the same verse (*Pls.* 55 & 56). The verse reads,

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> *Maiyā* make me a little older, only when I get older, can I go and graze the cows and vanquish all foes. Milk, curds, honey, butter and sweets, whenever I implore give to me. Kaṁsa, I want to kill and be triumphant in the arena. My rivals, I want to drag and rout. Powerful as no one else, I want to be, for the welfare of others. To Surdas have I pledged that I will rule over my Mathura.[16]

Painted at two different times, apart from the stylistic singularity both the paintings also reveal a redesigned visual vocabulary for the rendition of the same *pada*. A significant facet of both these paintings is that both visually unfold the "desire" expressed by Kṛṣṇa in the *pada* and not the physicalities of the *pada*. This "desire" in itself is not part of the visual rendition of the *pada*, since it is unmanifest at that point of time, indiscernible and in an amorphous state.

The corporeality of the *pada* is in visually portraying Kṛṣṇa together with Yaśodā. However, it would have been another cliched representation. For this reason, the artist/author adroitly sought an alternative and perceptibly manifested the expressed 'desire' to augment the core idea. The artist in painting two (*Pl.* 55) has only chronicled the 'dream' and evaded the 'crux' from where it springs. Whereas in painting three (*Pl.* 56), the artist has optically narrated both, the corporeal and the incorporeal or the ordained facets of the *pada*. Kṛṣṇa and Yaśodā are shown logically getting connected to the interspersed imageries.

The line in the *pada* which played a pivotal role in deciding the variant visual design of the two paintings is *bādhūṅgo tab ṭahal karoṅgo marongo sab bairī. Ṭahal karanā* in Braj dialect would also mean "grazing the cows" besides "roam around and wander". Thus, painting two (*Pl.* 55) only depicts Kṛṣṇa wandering in Mathura and killing his foes whereas painting three (*Pl.* 56) depicts both grazing cows in Vrindavan, killing foes in the forest and also killing foes in Mathura.

Paintings four and five are also illustrations of one and the same *pada* done at different times (*Pls.* 57 & 58). The *sakhī* in this *pada* is entreating Rādhā to give up her *mana* and go to Kṛṣṇa while he is still waiting for her, for if he chooses to give up standing up, he is not the one who will be at loss, but she. The *sakhī* insists that Rādhā should go. For, if the time passes, her going would be worthless. The poet has enumerated various analogies to drive home the point of doing things in the time when they are expected to be done.

In painting four, (*Pl.* 58) the artist has portrayed Kṛṣṇa waiting for Rādhā in the *kuñja* bower (top right corner). Rādhā is seen sitting ensconced in her home, delaying to go as the *sakhī* tries to convince her to go. The artist has depicted two analogies. On the top left corner, a man is seen wiping his mouth and pushing his plate away, as a maid advances to retrieve it. The man's gesture suggests that he has finished having his meal and after the meal, another maid is seen offering him a vessel of *ghī*. Towards the bottom right, a woman is seen holding back the container of water and not giving it to the thirsty man, as a result of which the man in front of her who was alive earlier, dies. Through the depiction of the poetic analogies the artist represents not what is apparent, but

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the converse of it. For instance, in the imagery, depicting *ghī* being offered to a man after he has finished having his meals is to be read as *ghī* should be served with food and not after one finishes having food. Similarly, the other imagery where the man is shown dying without water is to be read as "water" should be given to a thirsty man before it gets too late and he dies. Thus, these analogies instruct an inverse reading and hence I term them as inverse analogies.

In painting five (*Pl.* 57) Kṛṣṇa is depicted waiting for Rādhā in the *kuñja* avenue. In the adjoining *kuñja* bower, Rādhā is depicted with a *sakhī* who is beseeching to Rādhā to give up her fake pride and hasten to the patiently waiting Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā is portrayed as the *rūpagarvitā nāyikā* and the *gyāta yauvana*, the one who is aware of her youth and exquisite beauty. The analogies that only things done at the right moment are worthwhile and otherwise useless are portrayed by the artist. On the lower right corner, a man is seen offering *ghī* to another person. By this imagery, the artist has buttressed the poet's view that *ghī* should be taken with the meal and not later. The artist/author in this painting as compared to the earlier one has gone a step further in elucidating the importance of the appropriateness of time.

In the other analogy too, a man is not shown dying of thirst as in the earlier painting, but being offered water by another man. Thus, the artist in this painting has chosen to depict the positive instead of the negative facet. The artist in the earlier painting has not shown the coming together of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as it is not in keeping with the negative analogy he has derived. Whereas, the artist in painting five (*Pl.* 57) has validly depicted and pertinently echoed the spirit of the other two analogies by showing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together.

It is quite intriguing to observe what minor alterations and deviations can do to the substance and purport of the painting. The artist's fervid involvement can be perceived by recognizing such pivotal visual elements which subtly steer the signification of the painting one way or the other.

## References


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7. As cited by Janet Wolff, *ibid.*, p. 117.
8. As cited by Janet Wolff, *ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
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11. A.J. Greimas and J. Courtes, *Semiotics and language, An Analytical Dictionary*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 165.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Janet Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
14. Rita Sodha, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

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16

# Body and Transcendence: Representations of Two Contemporary Women Artists

*Shubhalakshmi Shukla*

The analogy of the human body as the locus of polemical debates around subjectivity is now a familiar theme in various discourses. Important queries and insights have emerged through these debates, feminism being one node in this complex. Among other things feminism has shown how the metaphorical interpretation of "body" as fetish is the experience of consumerist culture, where female body is the matrix of traumatic exposure. An attempt to displace such cultural confirmations of consumerism that came as a rhetorical groping gets problematized in the vast body of published texts written, photographed, filmed by women creating the entity of woman as reader. Her identity gets explained through the themes of crisis creating a conflict in the representations that frame her image as aligned to yet displacing the "pleasure object." The theme facilitates a critical interpretation of celebration and pleasure as a principle motto of the media world, complicating issues of gender construction, setting up boundaries of home and nation, cities and streets around the representations that centralize body. The images make possible a participatory zone forming a subject in study of popular culture.

Julia Kristeva identifies the subjectivity of woman in the "language" she speaks/expresses. She places the text as female body, the speaking subject, where semiotic readings meet, with psychoanalysis. In her observations around the maternal body she suggests that the intake of the food is directly connected to the foetus in the process of growth setting up an organic connection between the rhythms of the foetal body to the intake of the food by the mother. She establishes an inevitable connection between the expressive patterns in a representational language to the situated rhythms within the body. While interpreting a language the critic would deal with the experiences of the subject rather than mere descriptive analysis of the text where its purpose may be documentation like that of Natural History, her emphasis being the experience of the *subject* with the *language* it produces rather than segregating the two. She identifies certain expressions like anger or aggression within language as a result of abjection and places the notion of the other within it through the metaphor of the maternal body, a *subject in process.*[1]

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In this essay I would like to focus upon human figure as a *presence* and/or an abstract (*absent*) presence of the body in the representations of two women artists. Both Nasreen Mohamedi and Anita Dube, engaged in the subjective experience and interpretation of body, consciously avoid the human form as well as reflect an unavoidable self-presence in their artistic-linguistic choices (*Pls.* 59 to 62). Both the artists articulate a philosophic interpretation of the experience of human subject where the learning points to a transcendence beyond the material, through the senses beyond the sensory; a sign that is "body" and a dialectic between the two.

In the first half of this essay I would engage in a theoretical inquiry into the linguistic interpretation as experience of individual/subject whereas in the second section I would refer to specific time frames and observe the positions of these two artists as well as linguistic differences while juxtaposed. Most of the analysis of Mohamedi's images is drawn from the text by Geeta Kapur "Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved: Nasreen Mohamedi" published in the book *Nasreen Retrospect* (1995).

Leaning upon the methodology of reading "representation" as a language system (of signs) produced in a society, the analytical context of human body has generated specific meanings (syntax).[2] I depend upon the readings of Kristeva where the semiotic sensibilities meet with psychoanalysis. To begin with a code of *sensibility* as a referent for the human (being) body, in deconstructing the word "sensible" Jacques Derrida points out the inherent placement of opposites in it. "Sensible" is inclusive of sensory, that has to do with human senses as well as that which is mind specific and detached from the senses making possible objective/rationalized thinking. Thus the sign "body" can be read as a tensed component of opposition as well as combination of the *external* and *internal* suggestions of our experiences of the body that refuses any idealistic framing.[3]

Challenging the predestined nature of an individual in the "unconscious" (according to Freud) the focus on linguistic interpretation (Lacan, Kristeva) suggests that the *unconscious is structured like a language* where the silences and the gaps confirm its constant presence in the speech. Where classical psychoanalysis regarded unconscious as the authentic substance through which to analyze the human mind, it also confirmed its presence in a metaphor of a dark cave where repressed information would reside turning its silence into a monster-like energetic presence. The mysterious attachment to unconscious as fixed in the childhood experiences awaited its revelation in the rational order of the speech rather than remaining a space whose presence gets informed by accident (slips). A representation would thus figure around it like a language, a site, a context of its origin may be historical, its references in other cultures as well as reflections on the social practices be it institutional or individualistic. For example, the documentation of Natural History, describing plant and animal kingdoms as represented in the books on biology did give birth to the social institutes like botanical and zoological gardens.

**Metaphors**

The tomb is the life of the body as the sign of death, the body as the other of the soul,

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> the other of the animate psyche, of the living breath. But the tomb also shelters, maintain in reserve, capitalizes on life marking that life continues elsewhere. It consecrates the disappearance of life by attesting to the perseverance of life. Thus the tomb also shelters life from death. It warns the soul of possible death, warns (of) death of the soul, turns away (from) death.[4]

Mohamedi as well as Dube engage in a discourse on the representation of the body, as "self" in different tones. While Mohamedi's main preoccupation is with drawing/lines, engaging her body in a deliberately controlled activity, with the help of the engineering board, transcending the spaces of mind/universe; Dube's preoccupation is with three-dimensional objects in physical reality, providing an envelop of velvet cloth to human bones by stitching it around, transforming it into jewellery. Watching spaces as if open fields, the onlooker's position in Mohamedi's images is of distance, whereas Dube invites tactile participation although she encases the jewellery in glass case.

Within this comparable choice of a non-figurative representational mode, there is a paradox that binds the two artists. One is the difference in the time frame from where they infer, the other is their art historical leaning. Pencil and ink drawings on paper by Mohamedi (forming the theme of essay) were mostly conceived in the late 1980s, while Dube's engagement with specific visual language with a surreal undertone in her *Silence, Blood Wedding*, she first exhibited in 1998, indicates almost a decade's gap.

**Locating Shifting Positions: Art Historical Reflexivity**

Dube studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the M.S. University, Baroda (1979-82) while Mohamedi taught at the same campus during 1972-88. Addressing polemical differences in the practice of art as a departure from the artists of previous generation, Dube wrote the catalogue and participated in the exhibition *Questions and Dialogue* (1987), with the group that got named Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association (1987-89). Experimenting with new linguistic possibilities, she made sculptures in clay and wood although she studied Art Criticism. *Desire Garden*, was her first solo exhibition, was held at Delhi in 1992.[5] Juxtaposing the two artists is to imagine an elliptical form where Anita Dube and Amrita Sher-Gil as artists, position on the opposite edges of the orbit whereas Mohamedi forms the mid-point along which a straight line can be drawn to connect the three (in chronology establishing a subject in process). Tracing the shifts in linguistic codes of contemporary women artists (Rummana Hussain, Sheeba Chachi) it is possible to observe the collision of the three. I would like to consider these three artists in subjective probing of self-identities, to imagine such an elliptical form (when in motion creates a tensed orbit, to bring closest the polar opposites, at the juncture of minimum diameter as well as distance them farthest at the maximum diameter) where each case marks a conscious shift in the paradigm from where they speak. The form in motion is a loaded sign of the dialectics possible in the placement of each, creating similar diagrams around each if/when forms the centre.

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Amrita Sher-Gil's narcissistic image in the self-portraits painted with marked sensuality and a traumatic self beneath, as a divided subject not only intersects the concerns of her fellow painters, also overlaps and conflicts with Mohamedi's engagement with her body. It is, perhaps, the theme of "trauma" as an unvoiced force that guides the subjective framings of the three artists in quote.

Taking Amrita Sher-Gil's position as one of the first few attempts towards conscious individual subjective probing in modern Indian painting and tracing it down till today, one is able to find a shift in the reference to the "other" that makes the "self" abjected. The representations by the male artists in the patriarchal framework received the address of the other while the women artists had to depend upon the language that already existed. It was the thematic difference that marked their experiences as authentic in comparison to those described by others. Dube marking a doubling of the other in the existing language makes a critique and describes the body as a "fragment rather than whole."[6]

While Mohamedi was surrounded with artist friends whose engagements dealt with "local" surroundings while generating a discourse on popular culture/popular art bringing *human figure* back in the artistic discourse; Dube's engagements with the popular culture begin with an observation of display on the shop windows creating a material specific difference in the attitude with the artists of previous generation.

Where the identity of a material specific project forces one to look at local surroundings, it also indicates a shift in the paradigm for interpretation of artistic language. Presentation of "objects" as preferred to the medium of paint and brush on the canvas was one significant shift.

While Mohamedi's artistic background (1960s) through her artist friends places her in the socio-political groping for a new language and for the national/local, she herself found a speech for the "self" and that too through a formalist, minimalist linguistic mode. Her meticulous engagement with drawing/lines could be interpreted to have a precision of a spherical metal ball taken out of ball bearing, the absolute finish she admired for its machine made artistic simplicity. That is exactly where her experiences to artistic practice got shaped. She admired Agnes Martin and her preference to Piet Mondrian and the constructivist's devices to work out philosophic notion of space in the time where the machine dominated the measured fields of experience.

Dube for that matter always looked back at the objects and spaces invested with specific and ambivalent meanings, such as installations by Joseph Beuys. His psychological connections to the objects he wants to revive as if through the memory of the Second World War of which he became a victim, also served as "found-object" a familiar term in the artistic discourse by that time. For him, his own body had a performative significance; he would become a component element in constructing a space. He chooses the corner of the room and fills wax in the stretched filter on the three surfaces (the two walls and the floor), Dube chooses the corner of a ceiling and displays the eyes made in ceramic, pasted on the three surfaces (the two walls and the ceiling). The conceptual nature of her

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work compliments and contradicts the one of Mohamedi. In all the ways their groping happen to form a reference for the space of transcendence. Even if "grid" could be an analogy to draw attention to most of the European Modernist exploration (from Renaissance to Cubism) in the space of painting, it had transformed a great deal from its initial illusionist purpose to abstract structural spacing having cosmic references in the choices of Mondrian.[7] Mohamedi absolutely understands Mondrian's shift from nature to abstraction and probably identifies herself with nature in departure form it as if a shadow, the body from the self. She draws the body as two-dimensional (illusion) and the shadow as three-dimensional (real), where the light and shade method of rendering turns out to be obsolete.[8] Here the flat two-dimensionality is as if the sectional drawing of the object (body), where as the mass and volume in the body of shadow is a group of symmetrically drawn lines in uniform gaps, suggesting its shape, moving away from the sectional drawing of the body. These are also lines jerking arbitrarily in the free space as if the limbs go beyond control (*Pls.* 59 & 60).

While Mohamedi's lines could be a montage of the cyclic order of the everyday cleaning and washing, repetitive cyclic days in itself, the beginning of the day with light and the end in its diffusion, juxtaposing the vastness of cosmic time, birth and the death of a day's life, Dube's jewellery (human bones with stitched enveloping velvet) is a fetish object available at the shop window, cherishing gaze as well as distance. It is the specificity in the medium/material and the employed skill in its representation that addresses the two artists as of different origins, dividing their categorical aesthetics.

If Mohamedi takes us to the realm of viewing minimalism from her background of eastern origin, it is her search for the soul, that which is true and pure through the mundane, a desire to enter the space of the mind as real as the cosmic space. Dube's points at bewitching death that smiles in the material warmth of the body or rather at that moment of slipping away of the desire without the conscious that is interactive. It is the slipping away of the idealistic love fantasy that one holds true while watching a Hindi popular cinema and the making a dreamer of the mass-audience!

> Mohamedi belongs to the second generation of Indian artists who sidestepped the national-modern as a modernist strategy. . . her formalist abstraction against the backdrop of Eastern religious and metaphysical traditions, portrays existential stigmata and not merely internationalist markings. And, shall we also say detours the nationalist modern?[9]

Dube's installations of the bone jewellery (*Pl.* 62) constitutes the experiences of the human body and display a concern with the female body as a playful trope in the culture of commodification. The identification of the female body with the objects of everyday use, in turn commodify sexual and subjective identity of a woman and demonstrates the manner in which the woman is transformed into a fragmented metaphor in use, free of gendered identity.

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**Intersecting Discourses**

In present art historical discourses the emphasis on reading the popular cultures of a certain society places an inevitable dialectic in the manifestation of our popular identities in, for example, Hindi popular cinema. Where the former language constantly confirms the critique of commodification, the latter celebrates such consequences generating an image of lifestyles of an Indian middle-class.

Creating a category for the popular representation the artists from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s in Baroda pondered upon imagery that forefronted the representation of a particular "class" of people, developing a strategy that based upon recalling the realist method of presentation. These modifications superseded the idea of "realism" as a conventional category of expression. Figurative imagination yet dominated the field of what they framed as real, human body being the central code. This is also the time for the emerging feminist consciousness where the women artists started to adopt the idea of parody or pun to connote the commodified body in context, for example Nilima Sheikh in *The Story of Champa*, N. Pushpamala in *The Girl with a Frilled Frock*, or Rekha Rodwittiya in creating a metaphor of rape iconising a subject who is undisturbed by the loss, an ethical presentation of the vulnerable yet empowered self. These artists construe the body as a vessel, a significant whole, to invest the themes of pun and trauma.

Locating Mohamedi in such a background would mean to indicate an individual subjectivity that dislocates the episteme. Within her abstract expressions a reference to "class" of women whose everyday chore is washing and cleaning, she frames an artist whose preoccupation is to engage in everyday cyclic orders, a philosophical guide to her formalist engagements. She would thus provide a platform to imagine the late coming of the minimal in our context, somewhere in the late 1990s as a linguistic code.

According to Kristeva the symbolic element of signification is associated with the grammar and structure of signification. The symbolic element is what makes reference possible. For example, words have referential meaning because of the symbolic structure of language. On the other hand, we could say that words give life meaning (non-referential meaning) because of their semiotic content. Without the symbolic all signification would be empty and have no importance to our lives. Ultimately, signification requires both the semiotic and the symbolic; there is no signification without some combination of the both. Just as bodily drives are discharged into signification, she says, the logic of signification is already operating within the materiality of the body.

I would like to imagine in Kristeva's analytical method, the three different languages that focus on the human body, and those being the images from popular Hindi cinema, the art discourse basing itself on figuration and that of moving away form figuration as theme to critique commodification.

Where a silent autobiographical self in the non-figurative representational mode subverts the

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structural wholeness of the feminist insights in the visual arts it also marks the subjects through their languages as in(ter)dependent nodes.

## References

1. In 'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini', Julia Kristeva suggests that the maternal function cannot be reduced to mother, feminine or woman. By identifying the mother's relation to the infant as a function, Kristeva separates the function of meeting the child's needs from both love and desire. As a woman and a mother, she is always sexed. But in so far as she fulfils the maternal function, she is not sexed. Kristeva's analysis suggests that to some extent anyone can fulfil the maternal function, men or women. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, Basil Blackwell, London, 1980.
2. As a result of its study of ideologies as sign system, semiotics has discovered that all social practices are also signs that they are, therefore 'articulated like a language'. This means that every social practice, whatever else it may be is also subject to the rules of signification, bound by the difference between signifier and signified, and therefore the split between the referent and the symbolic. Semiotics, has, then, discovered the social law that 'the symbolic dimension which is given in language' governs every social practice. The immediate consequence of this discovery is to refuse the rival claims of idealism and 'sociologism' by refusing the polarities of absolute external and internal determinations. Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida and Kristeva*, Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, 1993.
3. "... the concept of the sign thus will be the place where all contradictory characteristics intersect. All oppositions of concept; being both interior and exterior, spontaneous and receptive, intelligible and sensitive, the same and the other, etc." Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, The Harvesters Press Limited, Brighton, Sussex, 1982, p. 19.
4. Jacques Derrida, The Pit and the Pyramid, *ibid*, p. 82.
5. 'At the junction and the crossings, in our towns and cities, where ever two, three or four roads meet there arises a still moment and its zone. A very restless zone, so sharp in its counterpoint to the ceaseless movement on the road, and this is the potential site for the new sculptures we want to make. This is a site waiting to be overwhelmed, to become luminous. From here sculptures will sit and call up the itinerant gaze of longing, already sown and prepared in pain and undiminished wonder, traveling opaque, resigned, tired, silent, on the roads. In the moment of sculpture a moment will become free as moment of enrapture, of joy, of recognition. Sculpture can create the encounter to light up the eye. It can sit patiently and become heavier with the weight of disparate desires, wishes, curses, correspondences.' Anita Dube, '*Desire Garden*': An Exhibition of sculptures and drawings by Anita Dube, Gallery Ganesha, New Delhi, 1992.
6. "... the more a woman reproduces herself or the beloved as variable, within the fetish body of a woman, the more "Man" and the market can enjoy it, for she is then in a tacit complicity within an uncritical titillatory aesthetic (which our commercial films have researched so well for so long and we are now advertising in all its fury) and which permeates our consciousness. That the pleasure and power structure in which it operates, which is masculine is doubled and the woman humiliated and served as an offering, she refuses to know for she has been chosen to remain a child of history" Anita Dube on Gogi Saroj Pal, 'Potent Vehicle of Shameless, Love', *Economic Times*, New Delhi, Saunday, 9 April, 1995
7. "The grid proper has of course a connection with a properly substantiated modernist movement. Mondrian, for example, who drives a logic from nature but takes it into a hypothetical structure of the

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universe as conceived of , or rather conflated with, the structure of the mind." Geeta Kapur, 'Elegy for an Unclaimed Beloved: Nasreen Mohamedi', *Nasreen Retrospect*, Altaf Mohamedi Trust, Bombay, 1995.

8. "Many of the diaries written by Nasreen were found in her flat at Baroda, where she had lived and taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts. In her diaries are abbreviated sentences marking an inner space, there are verses which are lyrical abstractions, significant squares, circles and triangles." Yashodhara Dalmia, *Nasreen Retrospect*, Altaf Mohamedi Trust, Bombay, 1995.

9. R. Sivakumar, review of the book *When Was Modernism in Indian Art*, Geeta Kapur, *Marg*, vol. 53, no. 3, March, 2002, p. 78.

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# 17

# The 'Madras Art Movement' and the Lineages of Abstraction*

*Ashrafi Bhagat*

The modern art movement in Madras was a regional phenomenon starting in the mid-1940s, which began forming its specific characteristic features during the second half of 1950s and early 1960s. With K.C.S. Paniker in painting and S. Dhanapal in sculpture as its leading figures and following each other, and pushing their initiatives in search for an authentic modernism rooted in the region's cultural heritage, they became the torchbearers of this new direction. The denominating title "Madras" though specifically refers to the city of Madras, the present-day Chennai then was a gravitating centre, to which primarily artists from all the four southern states, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka converged, determining its artistic contours. The locus and the arena was the Madras School of Arts and Crafts,[1] a colonial period establishment, established way back in 1850. This was the only government institution for providing instructions in fine arts in the region till mid-1970s. This accounted for the majority of the artists from the four states gravitating here; and each of these artists carried his cultural sensibility that he brought to bear upon his works.

Paniker was the principal (1957-67), and as the head of the institution mobilised his colleagues and a group of talented, creative, enthusiastic young students to chart a trajectory that led to the formation of this modern art movement. The regional characteristics and content in these, which can be described, as the making of a specific case of "regional modernism in art"[2] as distinct from the national and international modernism/s was the result of formidable young talents that gathered here. Paniker with his teacher-artists colleagues like Dhanapal, L. Munuswamy, A.P. Santhanaraj, Anthony Doss along with other ex-student artists like Reddappa Naidu formed a cohesive group, held meaningful dialogues, discussions and debates in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The energies were directed specifically towards reducing the European affinities in art and in rethinking strategies for deploying traditional regional art forms, which could assume modern sensibility and relevant contemporaneous expressions.

* This paper is partly based on the ongoing research thesis on the Madras Art Movement and its regional identity within the decades of 1960s and 1970s. I wish to thank Dr. Shivaji K Panikkar and Dr. Parul Dave Mukherji for going through the draft and giving valuable suggestions in clarifying and formulating certain concepts and theoretical issues.

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This paper attempts a brief analysis of the regionalism that played a pivotal role in the making of some of these artists and their art works. The focus of the paper is on select artists who practised the language of abstraction as a favoured genre within the Madras Art Movement. Abstraction as language preferred by them in contradistinction to figurative and representational language, otherwise employed by a large majority of other artists within the movement shows certain polemical positions as the art scene which developed and progressed through 1970s, 1980s and later. And as the study would reveal, although the language of abstraction largely served to mediate the expression of majority of artists tinged with regional characteristics, a certain international affinity and character was adhered by the artists few such as Munuswamy, K. Damodaran and Adimoolam.

**The Origin of the Genre**

Abstraction in its aesthetic aspect was a historical phenomenon in the visual arts, wherein representational or mimetic subject-matter was discarded. The artist either sought to abstract from observable forms of life, or began making patterns or shapes, volumes, colour and line that was self-referential and autonomous with a "significant silence" in terms to content and with reference to social and cultural context. Abstraction as it developed in Europe in the first two decades of the twentieth century laid emphasis on "expression of feelings" and "expression of humanity's spiritual nature" jettisoning references to optical and corporeal world. Over the past century, the lure of abstraction has proved a central preoccupation to many significant artists, and its impulse so strong that even now at the beginning of a new century, it remains an option to many artists.

From early 1920s onwards the impact of European modernism had been felt on the Indian art scene particularly in the cubist works of Gaganendranath Tagore. Abstraction as a matter of fact has been pointed out to be an elite domain, since Tagore boldly explored it in 1920s and 1930s, but at the same time was seen as a tract of art language that would not attract patronage or buyers.[3] Until the 1940s abstraction as a language remained unfavoured by majority of artists. This was due to nationalist agenda taking priority when a large number of artists were involved in establishing a style or an expression that would reflect the Indian ethos. It was since the late 1940s after the nation had won its political freedom that the nationalist ideology ceased to be the basic determinant of aesthetic choice and the artists could creatively and freely react to the modern international trends in art. The exhaustion of the emotional urges inscribed in the lyrical and sentimental style of the Revivalist movement of the first half of the century also led artists to search for something more rational and pure, unconnected with nationalist sentiments and literary connections. The decade of the 1940s also marked the establishment of various progressive groups in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay (now Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai respectively) and Delhi each with their independent agenda. Of these groups the Progressive Artist Group of Bombay (1947) strategically adopted abstract pictorial elements of Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, German Expressionism to establish their identity without any residue of the nationalist sentiments. The absorption and assimilation of quasi-abstract figuration

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in the late 1940s has been possible because it had a vitally different approach to making pictorial space, which also satisfied a need for a change of artistic intentions.

However abstraction made its forceful intervention only in the mid or late 1950s in the Indian scene when Indian artists with European experience returned to India to mould the post-independence artistic milieu. They brought back with them art styles that was based on post-war French development in abstraction. They introduced the aesthetics of colour and texture in modern Indian art, which until then was dominated by narrative and meaning.[4] The decade of 1950s witnessed the nation marking economic and cultural progress. And in the visual arts the Indian artists largely had appropriated European modern movements with their awareness within an imagined international artist community. Artists during the 1950s and 1960s who showed predilection towards international abstraction were N.S. Bendre, Sabawala, V.S. Gaitonde, K.S. Kulkarni, Ram Kumar, Akbar Padamsee, Shanti Dave, Ambadas, among number of others.

Simultaneously the late 1950s also witnessed an artistic crisis across the country. The crisis I am referring to is the nagging question of authenticity and the search for identity within the post-colonial experience, whose precondition in art circuits was based on widely accepted internationalism. The crisis urged artists across the country to rethink and redefine their ideology, which could neither be a return to older Revivalistic style, themes or content, nor a blind following of internationalism. An appropriately worked out artistic strategy in resisting these was in the making, which could largely displace these and replace it with the authenticity of Indian character and sensibility. Against this emergent trend, the beginning decade of 1960s also brought urgency for self-search to move on through different tracts. In this respect the Madras Group attempted intensive soul searching to become nationally visible on the one hand and on the other also to establish its own distinct identity as an independent regional movement. This regionalist tendency within the modern idiom became particularly pronounced in the artists of the southern region in terms of drawing on folk and tribal arts.[5] This approach bears relevance to the larger context of national identity enriching the national mainstream with the richness of regional culture. In this respect Tamil Nadu's two thousand years old distinct Dravidian heritage served the contingent needs of the contemporary artists when they efficiently appropriated the extant heritage through their discerning sensitivities. The agenda of regionalism in the south that became operational in the post-independence milieu was an attempt to battle the invasion of alien sensibilities, and modes of feeling and articulation. This called into question the problem of a nation's modernity and identity in the same instance. This was tackled technically and stylistically with pragmatic appropriation of modern European formal formulae and by the definition of Dravidian culture in the arena of regional modern, articulating a vision, which was either abstract or figurative in total terms.

**The Madras Art Movement: Regionalism**

The chartered trajectory of regionalism was to effect an assertion of a distinct identity, implying

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also a wish to integrate into the national stream on one's own terms. That the region specific art was meant to confirm its supremacy over others which brought in the nativist agenda that dominantly privileged the notions of Dravidian culture.[6] Yet, as would be seen, the vocabulary adapted as part of their art languages was hybrid, eclectic and polyvalent.

The important instance that sparked off the development of the Nativism that led to regional modern was the incident when the London based art critic Ludwig Goldscheider in 1954 remarked on Paniker's exhibition that his art lacked the "Indian" feel and character. This made the artist to begin a search for a revision of his approach to making art, and as he introspected he arrived at a decision that the national character in art should have precedence over any other criteria. This resulted in Paniker turning to traditional sources for inspiration, leading further into a deliberate search into regional forms of artistic expressions. The latter became a major preoccupation for a number of Paniker's younger contemporaries through his influence.

Thus when Paniker necessarily reevaluated and set in motion the process of indigenization of visual arts in south he meant to assert a cultural identity, as an act of political will. This further led to the establishment of a difference implying regionalism as a different creative agenda within the national mainstream. In order to successfully mark their difference within the country the artists mined their ideas and imagery from a phenomenally rich cultural landscape of their native regions, which added newer dimensions and verity in the Madras art scene. Paradoxically it was tradition, which strengthened modernity here and in turn tradition acquired authority and acceptance because it was mediated and interpreted with techniques and tools that were modern. Paniker realised that modernity could not be overlooked, as it was an essential process of cultural symbiosis within internationalism and it provided the framework within which regional/nativist formulae which could be productively worked out.

The artists explored art forms that belonged to the higher canonical traditions as well as the folk and tribal arts. These included *kaḷam/koḷam* or the floor decorations, *amman* goddess, *grāmadevatās*, the puppet art forms, the wooden toys, dance masks, ritualistic Tāntric *yantras*, astrological diagrams, the textile designs (*kalamkārī*), epigraph, iconography, temple carvings and epic and religious texts that served the narrative purpose.[7] The valorization of Dravidian cultural politics in art and its representation within the Madras Art Movement therefore was largely responsible for setting the momentum of the growth and development of the regional modern.

If nativism in art was based and formulated on the strength of regional character and content it obliquely had absorbed the ideology that referenced the vital political agenda of the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (D.M.K., established 1949), the party that came to power in Tamil Nadu in 1965. This party was insistent on establishing cultural nationalism (not necessarily territorial) that was central to its ideology. As cultural nationalists the artists gave priority to collective cultural realisation through a construction of the self-committed to a tradition. Though the artistic agenda was apolitical or was

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indirect, it went in tandem with the nativist ideology of the D.M.K. While politically the D.M.K.'s struggle was for an autonomous state with its agenda based on privileging Dravidian culture and the Tamil language, which negated Brahminic superiority (in scriptures and rituals stemming logically from their theory of Sanskritic Āryan culture) which fundamentally was in opposition to a non-brahmin Dravidian culture; contiguously in art it was marked by a resurgence that emphasised maximum visibility of folk art and culture and inspiration derived from historical heritage of various south Indian dynastic kingdoms.

The derivatives from folk art and culture could be formally termed as primitivism, since the folk art forms from which artists drew inspiration exhibited characteristics of simplicity, spontaneous naivete, iconicity, boldness and subjective power that operated outside the realm of so-called "high art." A search for roots and reworking cultural signs implied going against the grain of modernist ideology which primarily was to project progress and growth related to industrialisation. Unlike the European use of the concept, the question on primitivism with regard to nativism marks it as an important site for asserting identity. For instance to Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton,

> Within the context of modernism, 'primitivism' is an act on the part of the artists and writers seeking to celebrate features of the art and culture of peoples deemed 'primitive' and to appropriate their supposed simplicity and authenticity to the project of transforming western art.[8]

The concept of the primitivism here is the product of the historical experience of the west and more specifically as an ideological construct of colonial conquest and exploitation. The artists of the Madras Art Movement effectively employing cultural signs possibly were also fundamentally involved in the same process of transformation and change as the western artists did, but the agenda was also of emphasising regional authenticity. The motivated eclecticism in this context conveyed artistic wit and nerve to construe a hybrid form that potentially characterised it as regional and distinct from the national and international modern. While banishing reference to worldly materialism had become a central goal for the western abstract artists leading them to search for formal purity; what the artists analyzed here transcribe is the inherent regional tradition in the genre of abstraction positing cultural values, individuated to meet their own creative criteria.

### K.C.S. Paniker (1911-77): The Issue of Abstraction or Figuration

In discussing abstraction within the Madras Art Movement, Paniker's *Words and Symbols* series was a major breakthrough achieved in 1963 — it becomes vitally important since he set the momentum towards nativist abstraction through these (*Pl.* 63). It proved a point of reference for large majority of artists to evolve paintings that could be their personalised expressions, which translated the traditional vocabulary appropriately, adopted with modern sensitivity. He arrived at these quasi-abstract paintings after negotiating his artistic experiments in figural imagery, as he progressively

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moved away from predominant themes of national narratives like *Blessed are the Peacemakers* (1951), *Victory* (1957) and others to establish his own style leading to abstraction. This style referred to cultural signs and everyday objects. Whereas the phase starting from 1963 brought in a space that was based on diagrammatic pictorial logic of charts in astrology and horoscope writing, along with ritual symbols like snake, *yoni*, *yantras*, or archetypal mother goddess images and *liṅga*. In addition Arabic and Malayalam calligraphy also attracted his attention. These were eventually explored and made as reductive signs and symbols proving to be his creative springboard. A combination that was derivative of both tradition and everyday objects set the pace for Paniker towards productive exploration inflecting artistic creations that marked a strong regional bias with national distinctiveness. The melding of tradition and modernity whereby the repertoire of local artistic language and the reductionism salient to modernity came to dominate in his artistic practice. This established the validity of Paniker's abstraction, not only within the region or nationally but also internationally. It also marked a posturing of difference in resisting the American/International abstraction.

Paniker did not ever lose touch with the real world. He arrived at his abstraction after retrenching residual illusion, and through a major struggle arrived at two-dimensionality. His breakthrough work *The Fruit Seller* (1963) was a pragmatic statement of reductive pictograms juxtaposed with English script. The free floating structures of his composition and its diagrammatic orientation mark it as an experimental venture. Gradually his pictures came to be dominated with linear abstraction. Never slackening his grip on reality it signalled to artists that within Indian pictorial and plastic tradition the human figure was more an abstraction in its idealisation without losing its essential identity as a human figure. This also explicated a message that abstraction was not a prerogative of the west but an inherent aspect of Indian tradition. Not only the residue of abstract human imagery but reflections of nature also remained, reduced now to a symbolic purpose.

Within the broad definition of the Madras Art Movement there were no set artistic formulae. This becomes evident as one looks at the works of Paniker, Munuswamy, Santhanaraj, Alphonso Arul Doss, Adimoolam or R.B. Bhaskaran, who are not only different in their approach and conceptualisation of their artistic statements but were also consanguineous without losing their individuality in this collective endeavours.

**L. Munuswamy (1927-) The Gestural Rhythm**

Munuswamy is an equal to Paniker in his search and exploration of modernity, and yet differs substantially from latter's preoccupation with tradition (*Pl.* 64). The abstractions that he created had an international character, as his affinity to Abstract Expressionism is only in its gestural language. He too, like Paniker does not loose touch with the corporeal world and maintain the credence of semblance-dissemblance. This bases itself upon his manipulation of line that he dexterously employs. And a strong primeval expression pervades his works in their stark minimalism and daring boldness of forms.

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Munuswamy's vision was progressive, one that could be characterised as universal, experimental and exploratory. He chalked his identity within the Madras Art Movement by grounding his ideology in a larger world tradition and not within a narrow parochial outlook, and he researched modern masters in their iconography, style and techniques, particularly the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Cubists, and Expressionists including the Minimalists. He assimilated their stylistic expressions with his unique ideas to venture into a style that is avant-gardist, meaning a drastically different trajectory among his contemporaries. The experiments that he conducted broadening his artistic base within the wide spectrum of international 'isms' meant a resistance to the institutionalisation of Paniker's nativist agenda. Munuswamy declared "Indian tradition is something one just can't get away from,"[9] and he posited the values of cultural ethos that should not be homogenized.

The human form particularly the female form had intrigued his imagination and he had designated various roles to her. "It's a fact that the woman is the life force *śakti*. The creative and protective love generates from woman and it is the female form that has inspired and haunted man right from the day of creation."[10] He also explored his sensitivity to people and made numerous sketches in pencils and crayons of people in rural areas of Tamil Nadu. His politics of representation in art was a careful selection of deploying figure that he argued was more in the nature of an object to negotiate its relationship with the numinous space, i.e., the relationship of the field of space to figures on the canvas. And his preoccupation in grappling with the problematic of line and colour to space pushed him increasingly towards divesting his imagery of inessentials. Like Paniker his preoccupation too was to negate the third dimension and make his forms appear on the surface similar to decorative designs. In fact this can be said as a basic struggle of the entire Madras Group.[11] Technically to realise and explore the dimension of space in relation to human imagery he battled with his ideas and brought forth his conceptions in hundreds of drawings those according to him were "unconventional, vigorous and dynamic with a personal touch."[12] Realising that "life has an indescribable depth communicated without a language."[13] Munuswamy attempted to engage with this depth of life intensely through his visual medium. His conceptualization enabled rendering of reductive imagery that was handled with free flowing, casual, non chalant lines and colour tones. His exploration of the line is versatile and capable of invoking imagery or signalling dissolution. The colours had a wide spectrum from soft tonalities to strident dissonances invoking moods. His abstract imagery thus imparted a primeval energy in the way he worked the loaded brush on the canvas. This irrevocably projected the subjectivity of the artist mediated primarily through the figure of the woman. The objectification of the woman as a "sensuous female form" or interchangeably as an object became an interface of his language of abstraction. *The Lotus Woman, The Swan And The Lady and Rhyme* (1960) inflected this preoccupation.

It is interesting to note that these paintings were produced in 1960, at a crucial juncture within the College of Arts and Crafts when there were discussions by Paniker and his colleagues to move

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away from flagrant Eurocentric styles and introspect productively on the regional traditions. The strength of his abstraction was that it defined the native grain linking his roots with his preoccupation with the female form. His female forms largely also projected an affinity to Paul Gaugin's Tahitian women and inflected Henri Matisse's intensity and vibrancy of colours. But, it was the line of Indian pictorial tradition observed in south Indian murals at Sittanavassal and Lepakshi that concretised the graphic design in an easy and graceful flow of rhythmic cadence. The past was linked with the present by the validity of his contemporary expressions and there was a continuity of thought and tradition.

By working upon human imagery, Munuswamy like Paniker was also working against the formalist credo proposed by Clement Greenberg. The iconography of narration that was a deferred subject within the formalism of Greenberg here is privileged to define and construct abstraction. This undoubtedly set Munuswamy apart from the formalists in their ideological dimension but had affinity with the paintings of Expressionists who vitally explored the abstract character of emotions through colour and images. Essentially it is this, which imbues his abstraction with an internationalist distinction.

**K.M. Adimoolam (1938-) Poetic Naturescapes**

Adimoolam turned to abstraction in early 1970s from figurative black and white drawings that reflected imagery that derived largely from folk art tradition of the south. He turns to abstraction as a means to create a metaphor of nature and to mediate his personalized, non-iconic and non-semantic statements, which are least mimetic but signified analogies of colours and human emotions (*Pl.* 65). The abstractions of Adimoolam in this respect are distinct within the Madras Art Movement, as it does not make references to cultural signs.

Adimoolam's intense experimentation with line paved the way for his pure abstracts[14] investing his vision of nature with colours when he said; "nature in its totality interpreted through colours without focusing on any aspect."[15] The salient feature of his paintings is the cascading planes of colours applied with palette knife as broad colour strokes. Inspired and moved by the myriad quantification of chromatic effulgence of nature, the images are numinous, the world of nature as a thing in itself. His well-orchestrated palette ranges from blacks, blues, reds, greens, oranges, and yellows engage in a dialogue to create a world indicated by strong gestural marks.

"My canvases mirror my mind's journey through nature, not as realistic landscapes or seascapes but in planes of colours creating an esoteric aura on a transcendental level"[16] says Adimoolam reflecting a romantic mindset. This implicated neither mimicry nor mimetic strategies nor did it require reading nature as the truth of things. Adimoolam in his abstractions eschews the optical reality to emphasize on the tactile quality, not deriving from the culture of man but rather of the pristine quality of nature. It is these qualities of his vision that imparts universality, which marks its international validity.

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In the Greenbergian argument artistic innovations proceed through formal self-criticism. But Adimoolam moved beyond this dominant Greenbergian canon deploying the metaphor of nature to resist formalism — a resistance, which became productive as a personal statement on the vagaries of nature by the artist as also against the patriarchal authority of Paniker who disallowed complete eschewing of reality from painted expressions. Within the Madras Art Movement, his paintings were bound by the strength of decorative design becoming a central premise on which the regional modern acquired a stylistic identity and distinguished it from both the western modern and the national modern.

**V. Viswanathan (1940-) Minimal Intrepid Geometry**

Viswanathan is an artist with a radical mindset and his presence within the Madras Art Movement is significant. Viswanathan's lineage was from a family of *ācāries* that involved members to participate in Tāntric rituals. Within his consciousness he carried images of childhood memories when he helped his father configure the *yantra*s or the potent geometric diagrams on the mother earth for various rituals. This ritualistic culture undoubtedly manifested primordial elements that lent simplicity in its geometric diagrams for meditation or yogic fulfilment. At the College of Arts and Crafts in Madras where Viswanathan obtained his Diploma in Painting in 1967 he went through the prescribed pedagogy of perceptual and empirical conventions. But his restless mind desired adventures beyond placid renderings. He worked with the human figure particularly the nudes but found it difficult to push through the sensuousness of form to transcend it to a personalised and stylised expressions. It was the interrogation of the epigraphy in the Bṛhadeśvara temple at Thanjavur that opened up the possibility of abstraction. In studying the abstract calligraphic line formation of the Tamil script it gave him an insight to explore it purely for its visual aesthetics. In his nude compositions he introduced the illegible script enhancing the formal outline of the nude to create titillating visual textures.

A crucial intervention in 1964 when an encounter with an iconic black and red image of Kālī in the temple at Calcutta initiated his thinking in abstracting cultural and religious signs and translating them into a play of reductive shaped hues (*Pl.* 66). The shape that he investigated with great energy was the triangle with which he romanced in many media — water-colour, acrylics and oils. The polyvalence of the triangle in Tāntric rituals has expressed traditionally, man's aspiration for divinity and in combination and juxtaposition has the versatility to create infinite permutations. This dominant triangular form that was the leitmotif of Viswanathan's creations implied the most powerful connotation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in Tāntric philosophy. Weaving its magic on him, the ubiquitous presence of the triangle in his canvases became an unmitigated synthesis to spell out his geometry that was a dynamic interplay of time and space. "When you take on geometry as a dialectic . . . then it penetrates into veils of the enchanted unknown,"[17] said Viswanathan. Viswanathan's articulation of abstraction defied the Greenbergian internal logic of self-autonomy of art where the cultural narratives of iconography were deflected through the modernist abstract language. And interestingly

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what differentiated his abstraction was the play of simple opposites between narration and iconography versus formalism that found no favour in this inflection of modernism, which Viswanathan practiced.

Categorically defining his body as a *yantra* (geometric diagram) with finite positions he conflated the "self" with the "canvas." Viswanathan through this ideology transposed his personality into the work. Arguably Viswanathan in the tradition of Jackson Pollock claims, "I am nature"[18] obliquely laying claim to "I am the form that I create" since it had become a paradigm in relating Pollock's Abstract Expressionism to rituals of native North American artists. Viswanathan in materializing his forms on the canvas was enacting the process of a ritual through finite body gestures establishing power of meaning and desire in the creation of his forms. The metaphor for power was the space as vast and expansive as the oceans and deserts and a sense of awesome feeling before the void. Further reinforcing the metonymy of space were the Tāntric *maṇḍala*s configured on mother earth for fortuitous invocations, all of which translate to power and desire in his forms. The semantics of the geometric/Tāntric diagrams held no depth, but the surface imagery proved potentially rich for his creative fulfilment. His works though projecting simplified geometric statements evoke sensuousness in the complex display of not only triangular shapes but also the colours. It is this inveterate quality of sensuousness — an extension of his personality — translated in terms of shapes and colours that anchors it to reality and the lived experiences. Though his conceptual Tāntric derivatives were consanguine with the abstraction practised by the Neo-Tāntric painters within the rest of the country a movement that gained valency in late 1960s, Viswanathan's creative formulation remained distinctly different. This was because he consciously avoided symbols and formulae directly derived from Tāntric philosophy as G.R. Santosh and Biren De had employed. This perhaps distinguishes the works of Viswananthan and Haridasan from the other practitioners of the same movement thus reinforcing their regional sensibility within the Madras Art Movement.

The point of reference in his canvases to traditional Indian thought and experiences was purely at the material and technical level that was in terms of colours, brushwork and the canvas implying obliquely the noumenal space that he was exploring through geometric diagrams. In his works he transcended narration, historicity or mimetic representation to construct pure aesthetic expressions sans meaning or symbolism. The episteme of his native region engendered for him an essentialist identity in Paris (Viswanathan today is a diaspora artist having migrated to Paris in 1968) where his works were recognized with an alien sensibility (read Indian) with warm colours but not abstract in the European sense. This strikes a posture of opposition with European method for which abstraction was a process of reduction and simplification of a representational derivative related directly to some object as Monet had demonstrated in his *Water Lilies*, Cézanne with his reductive colour planes and cubists with fractured imagery. Hence it is the strong native identity — subsumed within the larger aspect of Indian nationality — which he pursued to make his works different in a European milieu that had abstraction as a dominant language in the 1970s. Says Viswanathan, "though I was

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surrounded by Cézanne and cubist masters they remained inspiration to move ahead without losing my Indian identity in a surrogate country."[19]

### P. Gopinath (1948-) Structured Colours and Planar Forms

Gopinath's initiation into the realm of abstraction was with culture specific signs of archetypal mother goddess imagery, snake forms extensively worshipped in Kerala, together with colourful *kaḷam* or floor decorations and *yantras*. Though a younger artist compared to Viswanathan and Adimoolam, his affiliation was towards regional agenda that was still dominant in late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus the nativist agenda was implicated in the early works of Gopinath but as he moved ahead he equally absorbed western and eastern tradition to inform his works. His aesthetics in abstraction were grounded in structured colours and planar forms derived equally from his experiences of life, and with reference to culture and the plenitudes of nature (*Pl.* 67). Structured colours are meant to reflect Gopinath's dominant preoccupation with colour which define his abstraction in contradistinction to Paniker, Munuswamy or Adimoolam who posit linear characteristics. It should be mentioned at this juncture that line and colour were two vital players in the construction of aesthetics within the Madras Art Movement.

The "Biomorphic" series that Gopinath started evolving in mid-1970s were informed of his varied and assimilated experiences. These were as wide ranging from Paniker's '*Words and Symbols*' to Neo-Tāntric art; to a study of colour experimentations in the artists of Kandinsky, Delauney, and Matisse to traditional art forms in Indian miniatures and folk art.

His philosophy of looking at the world that was in constant flux engendered the possibility of mapping this dimension of change on to the human form thus making it possible to continually employ the human imagery. The imagery of the human topos a deferred aesthetic in the Greenbergian critique takes a central stage with Gopinath's expressions. This imagery fundamentally was archetypal based on forms derived not only from his childhood memories of rituals performed for the mother earth and the snake goddess, but the same also was rendered in bright colours in *kaḷam* on the floor. Gopinath's sensibilities grounded in the matrix of the ritualistic culture enacted a process of reductive construction that drained from cultural signs iconographic and metaphoric functions. Consequently this resulted as translations and correspondence of the imagery aptly modulated without its sanctity. He stated explicitly, "there is always a human imagery in my pictures. The play is with the figures which I make it transparent with colours and details of structure." This mode of thinking allied him with Munuswamy who had employed human figure for similar ends. The human imagery pushed through abstract vocabulary colluding craftily to emerge as planar geometric shapes of triangles and elliptical curves thus premising a regional specificity in the genre of abstraction derived primarily from cultural signs.

The primordial elements that inhabited his canvases were primarily in terms of melded colours and planes. He divided the space into horizontal sections akin to a horizon line but dissimilar in its

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function within the picture plane. This created the planar effects that were reinforced with colour that became an all-defining constituent in his canvases. He mediated the entire construction of his ideas through colours studying it for their inherent characteristics. In this process he developed a predilection with red, which became his favourite mode of juxtaposition with other tones to arrive at his aesthetic statements that were a lyrical blend. The manifest play of colours was his traditional inheritance from Indian miniatures, which designated design in its aesthetic chromatic modulations. Madhubanī paintings enabled the power of simple line that aided translation to planar formulation. The colours of Paniker and the line of Santhanaraj reinforced this further. These sublimated expressions also scripted the strong design character, which differentiated the abstractions of Gopinath privileged on the strength of cultural specificity of his native village from the strict purity of canonical High Modernism.

**Achuthan Kudallur (1945-) A Trigonometry of Shapes and Colours**

Achuthan unlike the other artists mentioned in this paper was not a product of the College of Arts and Crafts. Rather he was more inclined towards writing and also belonged to a Writers Association in Madras when he came away from Kudallur his hometown in late 1960s. When he became aware that ideas as written prose/poetry could be projected visually with equal potency he turned to painting as his expression in early 1970s. Through a process of reductive imagery and jettisoning optical reality for compositions of geometric forms abstracted from his cultural matrix Achuthan settled for abstraction as his language (*Pl.* 68). In this respect Achuthan like Paniker, Gopinath or Viswanathan was not far in his ideology of expressing cultural values internalized in the sights and sounds of his native hometown. His mental landscape was crowded with childhood memories of his home near the river. The experiences of the performance of magical rituals accompanied by the chanting of *mantra*s and the rhythmic drumming in the fire light; the exorcism of the spirit with its quaint dance and eerie sounds; the festivals, and the Kathakali dances were mental images that Achuthan now recapitulates and essentialises to work as his abstract vocabulary translated as coloured shapes and forms. And for Achuthan colour was not mimetic tied to the definition or description of an object, but an autonomous concept perceived by him as a refraction of reality. Achuthan in reiterating the autonomy of colours was attempting harmony in their employment through related juxtapositions. The resultant ambience of harmonious totality would translate for Achuthan as dematerialised colours. This concept when extended would be its absolute, i.e., light. Said Achuthan, "absolute colours lead to absolute light. Light makes operational the colours and a successful painting is radiant from within otherwise it is dead."[20] And this was the strength of his perception that defied the "inner spirit of necessity" propounded by the western modernists in the creation of abstractions.

Art had been the direct measure of man's vision, which in post-modern reality was culturally located for Achuthan who had reflected on the possibilities of life and its transient nature deflected

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through culture. By relating his visual culture to nature Achuthan was propounding the aesthetics of primitivism made visible through his native culture. The unique painted surface organized without reference to representation but rather to correspondences of cultural signs (performing arts, rituals, worships, etc.) became the determinant for Achuthan's abstractions. It required cerebration an intellectualization equivalent to solving a trigonometric rider/problem. In creating an abstraction, according to Achuthan, one has to posit shapes and discover new vocabulary to materialize them. And in this respect no two abstracts of any artists can ever resemble each other remaining distinct as their individual signatures. In his creative process the trigonometry of shapes fluidly marked his picture plane drawing a strong analogy to calligraphic strokes, as one connected with the other to create a character. He cleverly related this process to a strong foundation in drawing which he stressed every artist should posses. In controlling the process of coloured drawing he intended dissociation to underline the autonomy of its existence. His technical virtuosity in the masterly handling of oil medium enhanced his meaningful creations. Initially applying a base thin coat in either red or brown and when partially dry he wiped it with a swatch of cloth or textured it by making an imprint of pressing into the semi-dry paint. These he said were his creative springboards, allowing for a continuous process of linking, slashing, adding, subtracting forms and shapes.

All the above-mentioned artists have worked within a broadly modernist framework, and their works sprang from a radical, experimental relationship with cultural traditions. Abstraction as practised by these Madras artists had a regional character tinged with dominant cultural values, emanating from Kerala especially in the works of Viswanathan, Gopinath and Achuthan. The cultural milieu within which they framed their visual language was made operational from the myths, epics, religion, rituals, dance, music, astrology and Tāntric practices that vitalised their artistic vision investing it with imagery of primordial power and froze them in time and space. This collectivity within the regional culture strengthened the nativist agenda in which the Madras Art Movement was foregrounded. Thus the paintings by these artists though abstract, embodied potential human experiences that were multidimensional rooted in cultural milieu. And by understanding these conventions, the artists were able to deliberate and formulate their aesthetics. Munuswamy and Adimoolam though operating from the same cultural matrix mediated with different concepts and metaphors to align their abstraction within regional national and international situation. A large part of artistic productions are made as an expression of national iconographic traditions. And the Madras Art Movement facilitated by its regional and/or nativist agenda, attempted an identity of "regional modern" within the broad canvas of the national modern.

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1. The institution was upgraded as Government College of Arts and Crafts in 1963. The upgradation to College was seriously debated by D.P. Roy Chowdhary but came through under the regime of K.C.S. Paniker.
2. The question of defining regional modernity in art was first raised by Shivaji Panikkar in his presentation

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'Representation as Language: A Case in the Direction of Defining Regional Modern — The Madras Experience', at the national workshop on 'Politics of Representation: Visual and Verbal' at the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, M.S. University, Baroda, October 2000. His argument of the "regional modern" was made stressing the need for an art historical perspective of the regional study of the south Indian Modern Art within its milieu to be characteristic of that domain and simultaneously distinct from the "national modern".

3. Jaya Appasamy, 'Paths of Abstraction', *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, Nos. 19&20, April-September, 1975.
4. Partha Mitter, *Indian Art*, Oxford University Press, London, 2001, p. 207.
5. A.S. Raman, 'Regional Accent in Modern Art', *Nunkalai Magazine*, Madras, March 1998, p. 27.
6. The Dravidian culture prevailed in the southern region of peninsular India from pre-historic times. From literary and religious records it has been established with certainty that by the fifth century BC there were Tamil kingdoms on the western and eastern regions of southern India. The Tamils have used their culture including language for well over 2000 years to seek and maintain political and territorial integrity. This clearly implied a literate civilization having cultural significance. The Tamil country had three major kingdoms: Pandya Nadu in the southern tip of India, Chola Nadu in the S.E. and Chera Nadu in the south-west with each of these kingdoms under several vassal kings and chieftains. After the fifteenth-century Tamil political autonomy in large areas of Tamil country was lost to Telegu, Muslim and Marāṭhā rulers of central and eastern regions of India. Finally it surrendered to the British at the end of the eighteenth century when direct political control was established over the Tamil territory with the exception of the princely kingdom of Travancore.
7. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* series were painted by Redappa Naidu.
8. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, 'Primitive', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff, The University of Chicago Press, Antliff, London and New York, 1966, p. 170.
9. L. Munuswamy, 'As a Teacher Looks at it', *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, No. 37, March 1991, p. 37.
10. Anjali Sircar, 'L. Munuswamy', *Five Contemporary Artists of Tamil Nadu*, South India Society of Painters, date not known.
11. This problematic particularly related to the entrenched academicism that was an essential part of the curriculum from the regime of D.P. Roy Chowdhary (1927-57) and which Paniker was attempting to break away by emphasising on the modern stylistic expressions in order to be within mainstream contemporary art.
12. Anjali Sircar, 'L. Munuswamy' — a monograph, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1985.
13. Anjali Sircar, 'L. Munuswamy', *op.cit*.
14. Adimoolam had reached a point of artistic saturation with his ink drawings and washes and wished to invest the element of colour to relieve the stark complexities of blacks and white. But it dawned on him that the strength of ink drawings and wash would prevent colour from taking precedence, so in a gesture he axed drawings and moved into the field of colour with his abstraction
15. 'Artist's Statement' at his exhibition of Abstracts in Chennai, July 2000.
16. A.S. Raman, 'K. Adimoolam', *The Southern Accent*, Tamil Nadu Ovia Nunkalai Kuzhu, Chennai, 1999, p. 52.
17. Rupika Chawla, *'Symbology and Geometry in Indian Art'*, Exhibition Catalogue published by NGMA, 1998.
18. While in conversation with the artist he emphasised this concept unambiguously.
19. In conversation with the artist at his residence in Cholamandal Artist Village, August 1998.
20. In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, December 2001.

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# 18

# The Female Body Problematized: The Paintings of T.K. Padmini

*Savithri Rajeevan*

T.K. Padmini was born in Ponnani in Kerala in the year 1940 and spent most of her childhood days in this typical Malabar village amid its luxuriant vegetation and idyllic ambiance. In 1965 she took her Diploma in Painting from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras. As an artist, she lived and worked in metropolitan Madras, where through her paintings she recollected her native village experiences of her childhood and teenage days. Padmini died at an early age of 29 in 1969.

In the 1950s, the general trend that prevailed in the Madras school was that of a western oriented modernist approach. This encounter among the pioneers firstly raised the question of national identity in art and secondly, the question of individual identity. K.C.S. Paniker is a key figure in this context and his paintings reflect most evidently the confrontation and conflict involved in the postcolonial cultural problematic and search for identity.

The works of K.C.S. Paniker during the middle of 1950s to mid-1960s vividly exemplifies tensions of a shift over, and his paintings of the period could be considered as experimental. They are experimental in the sense that his search for an Indian identity reinvented a two-dimensional pictorial space floating forgotten images from a collective unconscious through esoteric symbols and diagrams. This phase of Paniker's artistic endeavour was directed towards transcending postcolonial cultural amnesia[1] and western modernist influences by inventing an "Indian" style with its own "authentic" identity. Many associates and students of Paniker in the mid-1960s were also living and working in the direction of finding alternative modes of expressions based on one's own cultural and artistic heritage. Young artists of the time who were beginning their career at this point and during the later half of 1960s, such as V. Viswanathan, Akkitam Narayanan, K.V. Haridasan, Arnawaz, Ramanujam, S.G. Vasudev among others confronted the problematic in their own different ways with their own stylistic experiments, following Paniker as a pathfinder. Padmini was one among them who shared this cultural milieu and the artistic problems of the decade.

Although she engaged in art activity only for such a brief period, she left behind a large corpus of works. These works interest us not only because they differ from those of her colleagues and her

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teachers to a great extent, but also because they are marked by a strong individual sensibility and a sense of quest. The present paper is an attempt to focus on this aspect of distinct individuality that is exemplified in Padmini's paintings. It can be easily seen in the definitive figurative choices that Padmini makes, marking a difference from the postcolonial search for identity opened up by Paniker through his semi-abstractionist mode. But it can also be seen that Padmini took a distinct direction that deals with problems of searching and creating an identity for women in India through the remembering of her own experience as village woman in Kerala.

**Art that Differed**

T.K. Padmini's paintings exclusively portray a feminine world. They depict more or less a certain kind of daily life situation that prevailed in a typical Kerala village. As a Madras School product of early 1960s and a student of K.C.S Paniker, she shares many aspects of her style with her contemporaries. However, these aspects took on new valencies in Padmini's work. In her paintings, for example, the peculiar mode of space distribution disregards the illusionistic foreground-background conventions. In fact, her consistent disregard for naturalistic conventions appear to have come naturally to her pictorial language. The human figures loaded with feelings and emotions could communicate something intimate and direct. The palette of dull colour, which was fashionable among her colleagues, invites our attention, for in Padmini it worked differently. It seems that she has not taken colours as a confronting aspect in design. The forms are filled with thick strokes of mixed colours or are darkened with black. Though she indulges herself with almost dark and white colours, she exceeds the limitations by achieving tangible experiences of dark and light. On the background of black layers, the use of superimposition of heavy ashen white is typical of Padmini.

As stated before, her contemporaries encountered the question of identity and tried to resolve the crisis by throwing themselves to cultural encounters with the art of the west.[2] They consciously engaged in creating a new Indian art having dimensions of the past and the present of Indian culture and history in a pan-Indian perspective. Padmini, on the other hand, realized herself in a world related to her subjective existence, as a woman in a transitional culture and particularly in a transitional woman culture. She is not, I argue, a romantic wanderer who wanted to see herself in a historical past or an idealistic future but a woman artist who tried to realize her own life situations through the portrayal of the very environment in which she could realize her own authenticity; the kinds of duality in ones own being. The visibility of the village experience[3] thus produced, becomes her own self-visibility, a kind of self-seeing.

**The Emergence of Modern Subjectivity in Kerala and the Legacy of Raja Ravi Varma**

In this context one has to look back at the tradition of portraiture of Kerala women in the genre paintings of Ravi Varma, which serve as a reliable record of the complexities and contradictions involved in the subjective realm of an artist. Through consciously making paradigms for making

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female figures on canvases, simultaneously as national and regional, he projected the feminine as ideal.[4] By using the possibilities of realism he offered a new visibility especially through the realistic rendering of female figures in intimate household environments such as women playing musical instruments (*Nair Lady* and *Malabar Beauty*) or a labourer sitting at her work place (*The Reaper*). He constructed visual models which problematized the tensions and contradictions involved in his cultural milieu and artistic style.

The problems involved in the formation of modern subjectivity in Kerala would explain the tensions confronted by Ravi Varma as artist. In the history of modern subjectivity formation in Kerala, the end of the nineteenth century can be traced as an exciting period of transition. It was at this juncture that the major social events that prepared the ground for the emergence of the modern subjectivity occurred. They were the publication of Chandu Menon's novel *Indulekha*, the consecration of Aruvippuram temple by Sri Narayana Guru, the submission of Malayali Memorial and the constitution of Malabar Marriage Commission which can be cited as cases in point.[5] These events were the manifestations of the transformation of human bodies at the objective and subjective levels in the political and moral world. At the objective level they reflected the displacement[6] of the bodies from the grip of the mechanism of caste system into a field of discourses and practices of sex, whereby caste bodies were transformed into sex bodies.[7] On the subjective side, this marks the inscription of the body in terms of new individuation, which pointed to a new transformation of the relation between desire and the body.[8]

Although Ravi Varma's canvases, on which the female bodies appeared as natural and real as life-like, the women were not representations or life models taken from life situations. In a sense, they were after all the product of his imagination and creation. In other words, his canvases portray a pictorial world, which was different from the social and aesthetic construct as well as the traditional and indigenous concept of painting in Kerala. Here the contradictions are two-fold. The realistic classical mode of rendering of female bodies which is consciously posed as *Nair Lady* or down-to-earth types like *The Reaper* created stereotypical images of Malayali female models. He could naturalize them as "real" through introducing the method and style that was foreign for the viewers. With the increasing awareness of materials, the style, the sense of depth, perspective and shades, Ravi Varma produced refined female bodies in western neo-classical style on his canvases. The woman represented as Nair lady belongs to an aristocratic class, or the *vina* player posed in contemplative mood too goes with the same category. They are made to appear elegantly dressed up which was not a practice even among Nairs or other womenfolk in Kerala at that time. These renderings of female figures served two purposes. One, they could clearly distinguish themselves from common women folk. And secondly, a new dress code was introduced which was strong enough to make and display categories of custom and of a new "tradition." And thus they could make hierarchies and class differences hitherto unknown to the social structure of Kerala.

The description of the mode of being of female bodies in the erstwhile caste society in Kerala

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may reveal how the imagination and creativity of Ravi Varma in conjunction with other events could bring in drastic changes into the entire Kerala society. The new dress code introduced on the painted female bodies itself was the locus in which the male subjectivity could objectify female bodies.

**The Objectification of the Female Body**

As in the case of the general Indian pattern, in Kerala too, female sexuality was not juxtaposed to male sexuality. It is evident from the ambivalent attitude in the pattern in which female sexuality was constituted as formidable and lovable, auspicious and impure, violent and tranquil. The female body was ranked and placed on par with natural phenomena and beings over which human beings have to control and yet depend on. Such a conceptualization of gender differentiation was easily feasible in the joint family system in Kerala. In all the castes, the woman were considered auspicious since she had the gift of fertility, all castes celebrated pubescence or *ṛtu* — a Sanskrit word that also means seasons in nature. So the female body in the joint family system in Kerala might have been considered as an object or phenomenon in nature, which is to be depended upon, feared, nourished and utilized. With the introduction of the new conceptualization of gender based on the male/female opposition and Victorian norms of morality and sexuality, the concept of the female body in the joint family system had to undergo a radical transformation. That is, the female body had to transform itself into a sexualized object albeit one which did not contain a desiring subject.[9]

The technique and practices involved in this transformation were varied and complex. Till the close of the nineteenth century all the Malayali men and women, from *namboodiri* to *nayadi* did not cover their upper body. The only exception was the *namboodiri* (brahmin) woman who covered her body above the waist only when she had to go out of her house. The whole of the female folk among Hindus in Kerala lived bare breasted.[10] In Kerala, even in the beginning of this century, it was not the non-covering of the female breast but on the contrary the covering of it was considered obnoxious and a violation of customs.[11] The paintings of Ravi Varma, titled as *Nair Ladies*, *Malabar Beauty*, and *The Lady with Mirror*, are categories of females with a modern self, which form a class of their own. In the latter, she could wait for her baby's father as a loving wife, conscious of her body that reflects in the mirror. In short, she is presented as a romantic lovable object with a subjectivity. The contradiction lies where Ravi Varma tries to capture the real women of Kerala at their natural situations in life. Be it a reaper or a teenaged girl (e.g., *Amma Koil Tampuran*) of a feudal family, he captures them as real, bare breasted and with a single piece of cloth that was the traditional way of dressing in Kerala. These women with bare breasts were not supposed to be looked at as sexual objects. In fact, they represent the actualities of nineteenth-century Kerala society. On the other hand, the *Vina Player* or *Malabar Beauty* (*fig.* 3) become real in the created realism fabricated by the painterly world. The style and technique used in the portrayal make them real. Thus Ravi Varma's canvases clearly epitomize conflicts of transformation from a traditional to modern society in which sex has become a central concern.

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In this process of sex becoming the truth of the subject and the subject as the locus of sexuality, the modern society of Kerala was transformed. This centrality of sex is, of course, related to the occurrence of a shift in the political technology of bodies from that of caste to sex. The simultaneous effect of this process was the problematization of the new feminine identity, in effect that of the female body. Through this process, the womenfolk were Kerala transformed into objects of this new sexuality and subjects of this new identity. This new form of self-relation, which constitutes a tension between sexuality, the objectified female body and its subjectivity, became a field of problematization. It is in this cultural milieu that the created, refined female bodies on the canvases of Ravi Varma appears potent enough to make a breakthrough in the history of visibility. This is the specific artistic context through which we have to enter into the world of Padmini — an artist who problematized female body in Kerala-India.

**When the Empirical Reality of Padmini's Paintings Speak**

The domain, which Padmini opens before us through her paintings, is a woman oriented world. Though there are male figures present in her paintings directly or indirectly, the protagonists are females. She often portrays everyday life situations of the village life she had experienced and events from life, probably her own or from imagination. The interior of the conventional Malabar village where women folk gathered themselves, or the kitchen where they worked, or the backyard of their house with a pond display a local identity. We see images of a girl leaping into the pond, women in groups in several different contexts, for example, the swimming scene of typical of a Malabar village. The festival *Thiruvāthira*, which is exclusively celebrated by women folk, offers moments of rejoicing, swinging, swimming, singing and dancing. The dancing girls and the dance form they perform are also related to the same festival.

Another group of paintings remind us of a world of nomads, where men and women are free to be together. The paintings that portray women in the presence of men are those that transform this spatial limitedness of the female world. It is a world of man-woman relationships, a world that takes place in imagination or in a dream as desire. This togetherness sometimes invokes the image of a previously practised polyandry. This group of paintings need not be considered as the expression of the suppressed dreams of the women represented in the other group of paintings, which exclusively portray women. That is to say that they need not be posited as opposites, but all the paintings constitute a total world, a narrative of the female body.

The female body as a sign is repeated on the canvases of Padmini in several ways (*Pls.* 69 to 73). One way of repetition of the female bodies is through the change of its accompaniments or its contexts and surroundings. The other ways of repetition are through differences in posture, expressiveness, action and moods of these bodies. They are in constant dialogue with the environment, the world around them. For example, one could see her with a serpent, or as holding a baby (*Pl.* 72), or as a lover embracing a male, among many she would sit or sleep or she is maybe seen in a self-

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engrossed mood. She could be in a revealing gesture of expressing all her feminine quality (*Pls.* 70 & 73), mirroring both inner and outer space, with its piercing look and stern and stubborn posture, the body can also become self-reflexive. The body invites and rejects its consumability with strong gazes it casts (*Pl.* 70). It is important to note that here this painting differs from the ideal feminine image constructed by Ravi Varma. The delineated female figure breaks the conventionality of the elegantly clothed ideal image by the nakedness of the body and openness on her face and gestures that reject idealization and bestowed femininity.

Some other paintings that transcend the spatial limitedness seem to celebrate femininity within an autonomous space. For example, the female nude figure with hands raised upward, decorated with a single ornament of silver or gold typical of Kerala around her waist, stands under a tree. As the mythical character *yakṣī*, with a mysterious smile on her face, she stands enchanting in the woods. The mother holding a baby (*Pl.* 72) who stands in front of a small temple shrine and lamp also produces something other than the ordinary visual experience. Though it is a regular habit of Kerala village women to visit the temple, the painting breaks its everyday quality with the unusual stylistic delineation of houses, temple buildings and the evocative monumentality of the mother and child. In some other paintings the deployed female figures constantly encounter given ideal images of femininity. The nudes (*Pl.* 69) with a single ornament on their waists disturb the balance or stability of the meaning, producing clothed ideal feminine.

The world of man-woman relationships brings in complexities of varying degrees. They are not depicted as romantic pairs. (*Pls.* 69 & 71) They are rather shown as inhabiting a possible space of togetherness as well as the possible detachment within the togetherness. Take for example, the man and woman sitting looking in opposite directions under the tree; the tree trunk separates them and also unites them for they lean on the same tree. Deep in thought, they sit sharing the physical and environmental space. Their bodies become a theatre reflecting the conflicts of self. A caressing female lover figure by the stream and her lover lying on her lap is juxtaposed with another nude sensuous female body, seemingly frustrated and lonely, that lies on the other side of the stream. Together this triad of the man and two women opens an unusual space of possibilities by breaking the conventional love-relationship. Here also the conflict between the new subjectivity of a woman and her body that is sexually objectified is evident. But at the same time it tries to go beyond the limitedness. The redeployment of familiar images to an unfamiliar and an unexpected place too makes these entire complex worlds possible on her canvases. The stylistic change negating the classical mode of rendering also helps her to make the feminine world experience unique and expressive. The bold lines, distortions and the peculiar way of space distribution though Gauguinesque, or adopted from some other western masters, could be used for celebrating a search for identity.

Thus the canvases all together turn out to be a site of complexities of the female subject and constitute the painterly world of Padmini. The mode of functioning of this world, centered on the images of the female bodies, requires a detailed description. The elements and relations that constituted

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the canvases of Padmini are varied and complex as works of art. They belong basically to the history of the emerging subjectivity and sexuality in the Malabar villages and that of the conceptual revolutions, which occurred in the modern art scene. We already noticed the role of Ravi Varma or how his art functioned as a space for the emergence of the colonial male subject. When we move on to Padmini's art, we encounter the struggle of a female subject that has been objectified as a sexualized body.

**The Female Body Problematized**

On the one hand, Padmini was a village woman who was born and brought up in a backward Malabar village, still idyllic, around the middle of the twentieth century. On the other hand, she was an artist nurtured in a metropolitan city where she was exposed to global trends in art. These parallel identities as a village woman and a modern artist and the distance that intervenes between them can be observed as one of the important levels of relations that functioned in the creative practices of Padmini.

Another important type of relation to be examined here is the relation between modern subjectivity and sexuality. To be specific, it is the relation between the new subjectivity and sexuality of woman and her body, which is sexually objectified.[12] Precisely this relation is there between the subjectivization and objectivization of the female body in modern Kerala. On the part of self-conscious women, this can only be felt as a contradictory relation of the self to itself. Here a subject confronts itself as an object, an objectified body. The contradiction in this relation may open a new space for the operation of an immense variety of relations of self to itself. And one particular mode of this self-relation and its contradictions may irresistibly invoke one's being into a sort of practice that what we call creative activity. If we pursue the problem of these contradictions, we can understand the problematic that Padmini confronted as an artist.

As in the case of Ravi Varma, the historical background, which we described earlier, has to be remembered. The socio-historical setting of the moral world in which she experienced the tensions of a particular transformation of her being as a woman has to be taken into account. This new form of self-relation produces conflicts and encounters with one's own self, a kind of inward journey. On the one hand, as woman in a sexualized society she has to see her own body as an object that is desired, and on the other hand, she has to see the world around her as a subject. These two ways of seeing and their tensions are common in the case of every woman in one way or the other. But in the case of Padmini a third dimension also arises: it is a mode of realization of her inner tension between the body and subjectivity, and it is this which makes her creative.

On her canvases, the tension between the body and subjectivity converges in the female figures and are not resolved. Thus this tension acquires new dimensions on the canvases. So the female figures in the paintings of Padmini are not meant to represent female bodies in the real world. In that sense they are not pictures but female bodies problematized as such.

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# Part IV
# At the Edge of the Discipline

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19

# The Contours of the Androgynous Body: Deciphering the Sarnath Buddha Image Type

*Sugata Ray*

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. — *Genesis* 1:27

> When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the first man, He created him androgynous. — *Midrash*, commentary on *Genesis, Rabbah*, 8:1

To quote Janet Wolff,

> The major focus of critiques of traditional studies of literature, art and culture in general, from Marxists and sociologists, has probably been the task of exposing the ideological nature in art. A secondary concern has been to expose the ideological nature of art criticism and literary criticism. This is opposed to approaches which see art as somehow 'above' historical determinants and the style of art as the intrinsic development of style independent of social and historical factors outside the aesthetic sphere. These approaches themselves are shown to be partial and historically specific and thus in a particular sense, ideological. Works of art, on the contrary, are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities, but are the products of specific historical practices of the past, of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of these ideas, values and condition of existences of these groups, and their representatives, in particular, artists.

She further goes on to say that

> The ideological nature of art, then, is mediated by the aesthetic level in two ways: through the material and social conditions of production of works of art, and through the aesthetic codes and conventions in which they are constructed. Ideology is not simple reflected in art, not only because it is mediated by a variety of complex social processes, but also because it is transformed by the modes of representation in which it is produced.[1]

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The study of traditional Indian art generally is still bound to the concerns of stylistic developmental patterns and iconographic structures. Although a few researchers nowadays are engaging themselves in the study of traditional Indian art using the multidisciplinary tools of what is generally termed as "new" Art History; its expanse is rather limited. It is this paucity of obtainable contemporary research on traditional Indian art that initially prompted my attraction to the early Buddhist art of the Gangetic valley. However, my attempt here would be limited to making a few suggestions for an alternative way of looking at Indian traditional art and would hesitate to make any conclusive assumptions.

A new type of Buddha image was created at Sarnath in the second half of the fifth century AD. It was a softened, graceful and "feminized" image. My paper enters the domain of traditional Indian art and theology using these images as a reference point. This new image type may be related to the developments in Mahāyāna/early Vajrayāna Buddhism, with the combining of the feminine (wisdom/*prajñā*) and the masculine (agency/*upāya*) leading to enlightenment, mandated a less "masculine" Buddha image. This image type, I would describe as an "androgynous" body type.

Visakha Desai[2] has brought in the question of a representation of masculinity especially within the genre of Kuṣāṇa Mathura images. However a representation of masculinity and male sexuality would have to be located within a broader space and the prominence or absence of genitalia and its rendering, although an important marker (following Desai) would be one of the several signs to understand Buddhist male figures, and certainly not the only one. Before entering the difficult terrain of Art History, *per se*, I would like to begin with the definition of androgyny.

Understood in its broadest sense, androgyny signifies "neither sex, yet both" or the one which contains the two, namely both the male and female. It is an archetype inherent in the human psyche. Androgyny continually represents itself in myths and symbols, which have the capacity (if recognized and invoked) to energize the creative potency of men and women in ways that are not usually imagined. Androgyny refers to specific ways of joining the "masculine" and "feminine" aspects of a single human being. As a state of consciousness, androgyny threatens an individual's state of equilibrium as identified with a particular gender. Through this state there is recognition, a dynamic inner oscillation of forces between masculine and feminine poles of being. Conscious awareness of these forces within, of their continuing separation and reunion, is an essential part of the inner development of the androgyne. The quality of androgyny is experienced as much in the body as in the consciousness. The bodily experience can find expression in one's behaviour, tastes and lifestyle and through sexual intercourse, when this is experienced in the spirit of evolutionary consciousness; it is a mystical marriage and a blending of gender identities. However one would not assume androgyny to be a homosexual exclusive category but something that is beyond one's sexual orientation and is not to be linked with "effeminate/macho" lifestyles. Androgyny is the experience of the flow between the opposites. As possibly the oldest archetype of which individuals have any experience, it appears to individuals as an innate sense of primordial cosmic unity; having existed in oneness or wholeness before any separation was made. One would here draw attention to references

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of primordial androgyny from diverse cultures such as the Greek god Hermaphrodite, the Egyptian god Niti Hapi and of Nu, the gods of the primeval water from which the world was created or the Navajo Indian god Ahsonutti. The concept of a divine androgyny is a consequence of the notion that the divine being consists of a unity-totality within which are seen to exist all the conjoined pairs of opposites at all level of potentiality. This concept of a divine androgyny has been explored in the Indian tradition through innumerable myths, rituals, representations and devotional poetry.

Wendy O'Flaherty talks about the true mythical androgyne within the Indian context, which is equally male and female at the same time. But the term androgyne is often applied to folk figures that might be better be termed "pseudo androgynes;"[3] they have some sort of equivocal or ambiguous sexuality that disqualifies them from being straightforwardly male or female. These liminal figures include the eunuch, the transvestite, the figure who undergoes a sex change or exchanges his sex with that of the opposite sex, the pregnant male, the alternative androgyne (male for a period of time, female for a period) and twins.

Represented through a *maṇḍala* known as the *śrī yantra*, the concept is frequently expressed by the juxtaposition of the word *prakṛti*/material/culture with its pair and opposite *puruṣa*/spirit and the more abstract apprehension of this duality makes the pair roughly equivalent to spirit and matter. Inevitably however they also become understood as principles standing in close relation to perhaps metaphorically representing the female and male aspects of the divine being.

*Puruṣa* is the vital sentient truth that sets into action the entire *prapañca* (the visible world which is the scene of manifold action); and had two different forms; the visible, the invisible and a third imaginary form, time. There was only one Brahman; a Brahman, which could not be understood by any of the five *indriya*s nor by intelligence, in which, merged the contrasting polarities of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. It was from the Supreme Being of Viṣṇu that these two forms originated. These two were separated from Viṣṇu at the time of the great deluge and again joined together at the time of the creation. The form of Viṣṇu from which they occurred was time.

*Prakṛti* or the "primal material nature" has the prefix *pra* which signifies a natural process (urge) and *kṛti* is seen in both in an active and a passive sense, producing and produced. It is as much action as function. *Prakṛti* is thus the urge to produce and is called *praśva dharmin*, in the sense of having the immanent quality of productivity. *Pra* is personified as active female principle through which inactive male principle of the cosmos is manifested. Together, they constitute nature and its dual function of generation and destruction, which are necessarily interdependent. *Prakṛti* is also seen as the power of the three *guṇas*; *pra* is *sāttvic*, *kṛ* is *rājasic* and *ta* is *tāmasic*. *Prakṛti* is also again seen as *pra* before *kṛti*, that what existed before creation. Before creation *prakṛti* lay merged with the supreme spirit without separate existence but when the *icchāśakti*, a desire for more or creation was aroused the supreme spirit divided itself into *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and the right half became *puruṣa* while the left half was *prakṛti*. This basic *prakṛti* took the form of five goddesses, i.e., Durgā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Sāvitrī and Rādhā.[4]

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The divine androgyny can be further seen in the iconographic representation of the Ardhanārīśvara, "the Lord who is half woman." Although feminist studies have pointed out that Pārvatī is subordinated; she being on the left side, the less prestigious place of the wife and there is no question of calling the form, "the goddess who is half man," but an essential identity is none the less affirmed. That Pārvatī and Śiva together represent the two inseparable aspects of reality is a very common line of thought whose ramifications extend beyond the personal. Śiva is seen as undifferentiated, inactive Existence corresponding to his mythic persona as the meditating *yogī*. Pārvatī, or rather in such abstract schemes, simply the Goddess, is the principle of action and is known as *śakti*, power (from the root *śak*, to be able). Joseph Campbell describes the Ardhanārīśvara as conducting "the mind beyond the objective experience where duality is left behind."[5] *Śakti* being abstract while Śiva is personal (though a neuter form *Śivam* is sometimes used), it maybe thought of as a quality or possession of Śiva, "his" *śakti* and this concept is sometimes extended to other male gods, so that each is equipped with a personal *śakti*. But the relation may be seen as more strictly symmetrical, so that Śiva may be an aspect of *śakti* as *śakti* of Śiva. In either case, it would be a mistake to suppose that the abstract and personal conceptions of *śakti* are mutually exclusive. "If Śiva is joined with *śakti*, he is able or *śaktaḥ* to create; if not, the god is not capable even of movement;" these are the opening words of *Saundaryalaharī*, attributed to Shankaracharya (eighth-ninth century AD).

In the Puranic context, asceticism or *tapas* is rejected as a completely creative method of creation, which would indicate that a self-perpetuating creation must be sexual in character. In most of the creation myths, Śiva appears to help Brahmā usually in his anti-ascetic, androgynous form; but Brahmā himself is often portrayed as the original androgyne. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* again combines a different tradition, first Rudra appears as an androgyne to assist Brahmā but Brahmā was the original androgyne from whom Manu was born. None the less religious and mythological complexities within Brahminism due to such factors as cultic rivalries, an oral culture and a huge tradition of contrasting material makes it impossible to search for an authentic reading and interpretations and re-interpretations are an integral part of the study of Hindu mythology.[6]

In contrast, Theravāda Buddhist commentaries like the Pāli Canons and Buddhaghoṣa's *Viśuddhimagga* (AD 400) do not accept a creator god. As D.C. Sircar writes in his *Cosmography and Geography in Early Indian Literature*

> Buddhism knows neither a first cause of the world, nor an all-embracing spiritual substance giving rise to all that is. It is rather that something comes into being in dependence on and conditioned by something else. A first beginning is as impossible as is a definite end. The Buddhist, therefore, regard all attempts to explain the world or the individual by means of one or more 'eternal substances' (such as God, soul, original matter etc.) as just as usual. There are no permanent entities of any sort.

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It is here that one is compelled to introduce *Sāṁkhya Yoga* and *Abhidharma* tradition, the two earliest systematic formulations of religio-philosophical positions of Brahminical and Buddhist thought and the mode in which these philosophical schools investigated and grasped the conception of transcendence. Both of them look at transcendence as a characteristic built into the structure of thought. Instead of being diametrically opposite they complement each other and share in significant ways certain basic perspectives especially in the articulation of problem of transcendence and its soteriological importance. For both *Sāṁkhya Yoga* and *Abhidharma* tradition, reflection as a function of consciousness, is the structure of the transcendence of temporality. But as a function of consciousness, which itself is always given, "consciousness" of reflection has a built-in-structure of transcendence whereby it steps out of itself and relates itself to the object of reflection. The transcendence of temporality lies within the compass of being of the reflective consciousness.

For *Sāṁkhya Yoga*, "to be present" is the primary mode of existence of the empiric being. The temporal order of the phenomenal level is a conscious creation of the emperic subject (*buddhi ahaṁkāra* structure). But the temporal flux of moments or events is ontologically pre-given in the objective being or sphere of objective (*prakṛti*). Subjectivity or the *buddhi ahaṁkāra* structure has a peculiar ontological framework. On one hand, being the realm of embodiment it is rerouted to *prakṛti*. On the other hand, reflecting the consciousness of *puruṣa*, it seems to take the form of *puruṣa*. Thus the empiric subject has a built-in-structure of fissuration. *Puruṣa* is its formal ontological basis because *buddhi* tends to take the form of consciousness that belongs to *puruṣa*. *Prakṛti*, on the other hand, is the existential embodiment and operates through the senses. It is through the formal ontological grounding in the pure consciousness that the subject has the possibility of transcendence in the mode of self-realization.

According to the *Abhidharmika* perspective, *nirvāṇa* is a mode of positive being, an eternal existence that is acquired or reached or possessed (*prātra*). It is eternally existent and beyond the operation of the forces of conditionedness (*saṁskṛtatva*). As *dhamma* or reality, *nirvāṇa* is eternity precisely in the sense that it transcends the mode of imperfection of *saṁskṛtatva* namely *jāti, jarā, sthiti*. Thus in the dissolution of subjectivity, overcoming the distinction between subject-object and the flow of temporality through complete extinction of consciousness, lies the eternity of *nirvāṇa*. It is here that *prajñā* or wisdom; a feminine co-efficient is thus paired with *upāya* or means as masculine, in achieving the transcendent.[7]

The notion of a transcendental divine appears in the *Mahāvastu* (biography of the Śākyamuni Buddha, compiled by the *Mahāsāṅghika*[8] sect in north India during the early centuries of the Christian era), where the Śākyamuni is conceptualized as a *lokottara* or the other-worldly Buddha. Thus

> transcendental are the practices of Bhagawan and so are his *kulesamulas*, his eating, drinking and such daily action. He follows the way of the world just as much as he follows the transcendental way.[9]

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The central idea of Buddhist *tantras* contained esoteric rites formulated by Śākyamuni Buddha himself, as seen in early texts like *Śrīsamāja* and *Guhyasamāja* (AD 300).[10] Thus one could trace a lineage of Tāntric ideas like the *mahāmudrā* and *prajñāpāramitā* (in an embryonic form) to a much earlier date than the generally accepted post-Gupta eras. The Buddhists want the creation and unfoldment of the world; coming back to the uncreated, unformed state of *śūnyatā* and the becoming of this consciousness is *prajñā* or highest knowledge. *Prajñā*, the passive all-embracing female principle from which everything proceeds and recedes is united with the dynamic male principle of active, universal love and compassion which represents the means/*upāya*. Through the realisation of *prajñā* or *śūnyatā*, perfect Buddhahood is achieved. The union of male and female where the active is male and the passive is female in contrast to the Hindu Tantras in which the female aspect is active and the male aspect is passive represents the process of enlightenment. The meditation on the *prajñā* and the *upāya* is not possible without attaining the female element *śakti*. One had to conjoin the *mahāmudrā* (the ultimate feminine principle) with the *upāya* which is in one's own body and the knowledge of *mahāmudrā* can be realised by one's own self only. According to R.S. Gupte[11] the concept of *śakti* (emanating from the Dhyānī Buddhas) and the theory of Kuleśa (the divine family consisting of Buddhas, *bodhisattava*s and their *śakti*s) gained acceptance from this period onwards (AD 300). The psychophysical practice of Tantric *yoga sādhanā* is an effort to realize the ultimate feminine principle, the all-inclusive *śakti*, and the power that pervades all things and actions. This *śakti*, fundamental power (*kula kuṇḍalinī*) resides in the *mūlādhāra cakra* and this *yoga-sādhanā* is called *ṣaṭ-cakra bheda*.[12] M.C. Doshi and J.N. Banarjea on the basis of epigraphic and literary evidence have shown the prevalence of Śākta Tantricism in this elemental form in the Mahāyāna phase from AD 300 onwards.

These abstruse modifications within the conception of a transcendental divine, who had within him both the male and female ideals, would have its ramification within the traditions of contemporaneous art production. Production is always cultural.[13] To represent this change in Buddhist theology visually, the artists required a language that was not available within the male bodies represented in the earlier periods. One would have to cursorily look at the changes in the visual history of Buddha images to demonstrate this fact. The place of the origin of the Buddha image is an unresolved art historical debate. Whether the genesis of Buddhist art was iconic or aniconic and the interrogation regarding the inception of iconic imagery in the Gāndhāra or Mathura region are beyond the concerns of my current investigation. However as A.K. Coomaraswamy has put it

> Long before the Buddha image became a cult object, the familiar form of the seated *yogī* may have presented itself in the Indian mind in inseparable association with the idea of a mental discipline and of the attainment of the highest station of self-oblivion; and when the development of the imagery followed there was no other form which could have been made a universally recognized symbol of him-who-had-thus-attained.[14]

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One could perhaps thus trace the Buddha image's antecedent in the existing figural languages of *yakṣa*s and other such male figures.

Possibilities like a stylistic development or concretization of *lakṣaṇa*s[15] has been generally used to explain the subtle shifts in the rendering of the Buddha's body type. However *lakṣaṇa*s or body types in Indian texts do not talk about the subtler physiognomy of the body but are more concerned with body markings and iconometry. For example, textual references from the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* in which the 36th *adhyāya*[16] deals with the *Haṁsa* type who is the *cakravartin* is allotted with the division of 108 parts or *aṅgula*s and hence it is this type, which becomes the standard for all other body types. Other *Śilpa* texts like *Citralakṣaṇa* of Nagnajit, *Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra* or the *Aparājitapṛcchā* provide similar typologies in categorizing types of men but do not talk of the intrinsic physiognomy.

A stylistic developmental pattern has been put forth to explain the Buddha's body type that gained prominence in Sarnath during the AD 470s. I have here drawn a developmental chart based on stylistic evolution within the Mathura-Sarnath school keeping in mind certain images that have been considered as seminal in understanding this evolution, according to art historical writings by scholars like R.S. Sharma, Susan Huntington and Joanna Williams.

**Kuṣāṇa Period (late first century AD to third century AD)**

WITHIN THE SARNATH-MATHURA CULTURAL REGION

(a) Clear expressive features

(b) Foliage indicating *bodhi* tree, peepal leaves quite conspicuous

(c) Two celestials hovering with wreaths on two sides, flanked by acolytes on each side

(d) *Ūrṇā* is incised between eyebrows

(e) Almond-shaped eyes, small earlobes and a smiling face

(f) *Cakravartin* style through clenched left hand resting on knee, right hand *abhaya-mudrā*

(g) *Padmāsana* pose, *triratna* marked on upturned soles

(h) Stiffness of posture similar to corpulence of *yakṣa* images.

Seminal examples from this period would include:

- *Bhikku Bāla Bodhisattva* from Sarnath (third year of Kaniṣka's reign) (*Pl.* 76)
- *Katra Buddha* from Katra, Mathura (*ca.* second century)
- Buddha from Ahicchatra (32nd year of Kaniṣka's reign?)

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WITHIN THE GĀNDHĀRA REGION

- Realistic approach and different postures like *abhaya, vyākhyāna, dharmacakravartana* and *bhūmisparśa.*

However, as a micro-study I have tried to work within a certain geographic space (i.e., Mathura-Sarnath region) and would not be looking into the ramifications of Gāndhāra Buddhist art at this juncture.

**Gupta Period (fourth century AD to sixth century AD approx.) (*Pls.* 77 & 78)**

(a) Emphasis on expression

(b) Figure made slim and elegant

(c) Handsome and youthful body

(d) Elaborate halo representing radiation of knowledge

(e) Figure of Buddha dominates; animal and vegetal world is significantly reduced

(f) Eyes made large, lotus bud-shaped, half open symbolising infusion, inward vision and meditation

(g) The flexion of one leg giving a feeling of motion.

Seminal examples from this period would include:

- Buddha from Jamalpur, Mathura (mid-fifth century)
- Buddha from Sarnath (during reign of Buddhagupta, Gupta era 157)
- Buddha from Sarnath (*ca.* 475)

Joanna Williams describes the Sarnath Buddha type as a "development of a local tradition with roots in Kuṣāṇa and embellishments and forms borrowed from Mathura, which burst into prominence in the 470s."[17] Stella Kramrisch, on the other hand, explains the physiognomy of these images through the concept of "transubstantiation," which according to her comes in the following manner:

> The principle of the vegetative movement persists, while vegetation in which it had been beheld originally withdraws. It immigrates into the human body and makes it its vessel. But the shape remains suggestively human and the principle of the movement from its plant-origin reaches a human destination. Within the body this movement belongs to the physical as well as inner life. The movement of the inner life as well as that of the vital currents is identical with the vegetative movement. While in this aspect the body becomes plant-like in swaying rhythm and plasticity; it is the vessel of the movement of the physical and of inner life. The human body does not stand

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> for physical appearance. It is the form of movement of life. The 'without' when transferred into the 'within' becomes identical there with the beyond.[18]

One could take this argument further by evoking the familiar trope of the equation between nature (vegetative), feminine and fertility, thus trying to engender the notion of the "vegetative" in Indian art. The affirmation of the regenerative potential of nature and female inherently determines a connection to the predictable analogy in the perception of the parallelism of these leading to the identification of the two identities nature and female body, as part and parcel of the same phenomena. One could, therefore following Kramrisch, say that it is in this period that the "feminine" enters the Buddha's body and "transubstantiation" or as I would put it "transcendence" occurs.

However, one could also see this distinctive body type as an outcome of the sculptor's negotiation with existing traditions of figural representations to seek an ideal portrayal of the transcendental, of the divine within whom existed the male as well as the female absolute and where else could the artist find this particular androgynous body type except by infusing two different visualities, the earlier representation of the masculine with the feminine (*Pls.* 74 & 75). That Indian visual history has a well-defined conception of masculine and feminine can be seen in the representation of Ardhanārīśvara (although belonging to different traditions time and contexts) where despite anatomical differences being well delineated, gender differences are further highlighted through the usage of gender-specific jewellery. Visual history also shows that positioning of the body within the frame is gender specific. For example, one sees that the men with the *tribhaṅga* posture are rare (*Pl.* 74) and when seen, are shown with the movement from the waist unlike the common depiction of women with the *tribhaṅga* posture from the hip (*Pl.* 75). It is only in the late fifth century that one start coming across men with *tribhaṅga* postures from the hip more frequently. Thus one could speculate that it was in the Sarnath-Mathura region, a new visuality or language arose conjoining the distinct ideas of maleness and femaleness.

The absence of *Bodhisattva* images (only 8 images of this period from Sarnath are known world-wide) unlike in contemporaneous site like Aurangabad[19] and the discovery of almost 400 Buddha images of the Sarnath body type, found in Sarnath Museum alone,[20] would probably imply a certain region-specific development in theology. Further instances to ascertain a regional development in Buddhism can be seen in literary and epigraphic examples. For example, the aim of dedication of Buddha images as *anuttarajñānavāpāti* (attainment of supreme knowledge) is seen in later epigraphy (example, Jamalpur Mathura Buddha) as against *sarvasattvasnāmhitasukhārtham* mentioned in Kuṣāṇa dedicatory inscriptions.[21] This could be seen as a shift from mortality to divinity, from the *cakravartin* to the *lokottara* Buddha that can be perceived in context to the *lokottara* concept of the *Mahāsāṅghika*s where transcendence occurs from the union of the masculine and feminine ideals. The early Sarnath art works preceding the date of 470 may be related with the Sarvāstivāda sect as can be inferred from the *sarvāstivādin*'s monastic dress especially the belt which a later Chinese traveller, I Ching,

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describes as a knotted waistband holding up the undergarment.[22] One could here refer to the *bodhisattva bhikku bala* and certain contemporaneous images having a similar belt and that the placing of the knot in these images is totally different from earlier *yakṣa* or later Buddhist art traditions.

In fact, continuing from the Sarnath tradition, certain strands of religious figurative representations, until modern times are imbued with the androgynous mode that is being investigated here. That a mode of representation was a conscious choice from the available modes is further ratified if one examines pre-Pāla and early Pāla Buddhist and Brahminical art. Thus while the Buddhist art followed the Mathura-Sarnath idiom it was the Pāla Brahminical art of this period that would exhibit divergent stylistic characteristics, following the north-central typology of a squat, thick set and masculine imagery. While different reasons like political choices, patronage, guild lineages can be used to explain these distinct stylistic trajectories; the fact remains that there was a conscious choice of a certain physiognomic typology, containing within it certain societal politics. Thus the "determiners of taste" (artists/guilds/patrons) chose a maleness, which would suit their rationale, whether in Sarnath or Bengal. One would also have to conceptualize within the broader parameters of such an interrogation later sects[23] and psychoanalytical studies to enquire into the constructions of "masculinity" and "femininity" within the theological traditions and the domains where the polarities of gender would conjoin to create a harmonious existence between the *jīvātman* and *paramātman*.

However before ending, I would like to voice through my analysis a search for an "usable past,"[24] keeping in mind the perils of such a concern, that is a past which can validate the presence, by rejecting the view of religious traditions being the exclusive hallmark of patriarchy through reconstructing and reconsidering it and taking the discourse beyond merely informing a body of scholarship to pursue its practical implications as well. However sexist Buddhist traditions are or have become, it is not irreparably so. Such a revalorization through attaining an androgynous identity — a process that is actually the undressing of self and ego — ultimately allows for and manifests the desired higher state of consciousness and spirituality.

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7. The Sāṁkhya philosophy was one of the six Hindu orthodox philosophies, a philosophy of dualistic realism attributed to the sage Kapila. It was later compiled by Īśvarakṛṣṇa as *Sāṁkhyakārikā* (*c.* AD 200-450 ). This Sāṁkhya was originally atheistic and known as *Nirīśvara Sāṁkhya* but was subsequently merged with the theistic *Yoga* system and played a very consequential role in influencing later philosophies. The Abhidharma, on the other hand, was one of the three *Piṭaka*s or main divisions of the Pāli Canons, the other two being the *Suttas* or sermons and the *Vinayas* or the rules of the Saṁgha.
8. The *Mahāsāṅghika*s were the forerunners of Mahāyāna, believing that Buddha was *lokottara* (supramundane) and the *Caityaka*s, an offshoot of the *Mahāsāṅghikas*, were the first to deify Śākyamuni Buddha and his *bodhisattva*s. In the Second Great Council, held 100 years after Śākyamuni Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, at Vaiśālī the *Mahāsāṅghika*s were expelled by the *sthaviravādins* because the latter were not willing to make any concessions on the ten minor points raised by the *Mahāsāṅghika*s. The *Mahāsāṅghikas* established themselves at Pāṭaliputra and Vaiśālī and the earliest epigraphic evidence are found on the Mathura lion capital where it mentions a gift to a *Mahāsāṅghika* teacher Budhila to promote the Law. However later evidences of *Mahāsāṅghika*s are found in innumerable site extending from Kārle to Afghanistan. The early *Mahāsāṅgika* canons, according to Yuan Chwang and Fa-Hien, had a collection of *mantric* formulae in texts like the *Dharaṇī Piṭaka*, *Manjuśrī Mūlakalpa* (first century AD) containing *mudrā*s, *maṇḍala*s, *mantra*s and *dharaṇī*s and the *abhidharma.* Initially the *Mahāsāṅghikas* had limited power and were not able to assert themselves. The Kharoṣṭhi inscription of a pillar in Mathura during the time of Śaka Kṣatrapas Rajuvula and his son Sodasa (first century BC) talk about the *sarvāstavādin*s contesting the *Mahāsāṅghika*s and defeating them. The Sarvāstivāda (one of the early schools of Buddhism according to whom all things exist *sarvam asti*) was a Sanskritic Hīnayāna school whose main centre was in Mathura and Sarnath, which had branched out from the Sthaviravāda Theravāda. Four inscriptions of third century (before AD 470) in the Mathura-Sarnath region show *sarvastivādin* allegiance mentioning *acāryāṇam sarvāstivādinam* while two more in Pālī show Theravāda allegiance. As cited in Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India, Empire and Province*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and New Jersey, 1982, p. 69).
9. Jones, J.J. (tr.), *Mahāvastu*, London, 1952, pp. 167-68.
10. According to writers like Padmavajra (AD 693) who compiled the *Guhyasiddhi* and Taranath, *History of Buddhism in India.* Trans. Lala Chimpa and A Chattopadhyaya; ed. D. Chattopadhyaya, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1970.
11. R.S. Gupte, *Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains*, Taraporevala & Sons, Bombay, 1972.
12. The seven *padma*s of the *suṣumnā*-cord are the seven seats of femininity, which according to Tantrism is inherent in every human being. When aroused *kuṇḍalinī śakti* reaches the *ājñā cakra* and the practitioner attains *sārūpya mukti*, wherein he/she assumes a form similar to that of the goddess. Further when the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* reaches the *sahasradalapadma* the practitioner achieves *sāyujya mukti*, which is an undivided union with the goddess.
13. Here, I would define culture as consistent recurrence of an assemblage limited in time and space assuming that, culture, thus defined, reflects contemporaneous social distinctions (following ed. Allan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, London, 1988). Terry Smith further elucidates, 'Production is always cultural. The scope of these relationships is limited by historical possibility, by the kinds of production made possible through the available means and in the relevant conditions. . . . Art as a productive activity in which actual materials are transformed in order to communicate, or invite the consumption, of immaterialities such as images, feelings, ideas'. (as cited in Terry Smith 'Modes of production' in ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Schiff, *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago, 1996, pp. 237-55).
14. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*, New Delhi,1999 (Reprint), p. 60.

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15. Harsha Dehajia, *Aesthetics of the Buddha Image* in V. Subramaniam, (ed.), *Buddhist-Hindu interactions from Śākyamuni to Sankaracharya*, New Delhi, 1993.
16. The 36th *adhyāya* is concerned with the 5 male types exemplifying the canons of iconometry, which are *haṁsa, bhadra, mālavya, rūcaka* and *śaśaka*.
17. Joanna G. Williams, pp. 79-82.
18. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, Oxford and London, 1933, pp. 55.
19. According to Walter Spink and Susan Huntington, Cave 1 and 3 of Aurangabad are considered contemporaneous to Mahāyāna phase of Ajanta (late fifth century AD).
20. Joanna G. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
21. R C. Sharma, *Buddhist art of Mathura*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1984.
22. Joanna G. Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 81.
23. Here I would like to mention of later philosophers like Caitanya or Ramakrishna Paramhansa who led a transgressive existence, fusing the male and female elements within their body.
24. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 1993 (abstract of book from website).

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# 20

# The New Antiquity of 'Tamil' Temples
## Constructing Identities through Architecture

*Shriya Sridharan*

> We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long line developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.
>
> — Michel Foucault

Traditional Art History, following the Orientalist methodology, would place a particular style of architecture within a linear framework of History. In a contemporary society the analysis of an art tradition as merely an extension of the past seems inadequate, because art, especially religious art, does not function as an insulated activity. This paper examines the temple architecture in contemporary Tamil Nadu as it functions within the socio-cultural politics of the society which consumes it.

Tamil Nadu is chosen for the reason that it portrays its identity as a "Dravidian" State and temple architecture is used as an important portal to display this identity. Here is an example, where, a political movement, the Dravid movement in this case study, has left a clear influence on art practice, thereby restricting an insulated analysis.

The Dravidian style of architecture attributed to the southern region in general, is propagated as an indigenous tradition exclusive to Tamil Nadu. Architectural elements that can be associated with this style are displayed in sacred as well as secular spaces. And the Dravidian style of architecture signifies, specifically, the "authentic" art tradition of the region.

The intention of this paper is that such a study of temple architecture, which is interlinked with a political ideology, requires a multi-linear perspective and an understanding of the society it functions within. The art tradition when recreated in the postcolonial "Dravidian" society, displays a style that cannot be analyzed as a linear continuation of the art historically defined Pallava, Coḷa, Vijayanagara and Nāyaka styles. It seems like the canonical art tradition, whose origin is attributed to the "Sanskrit speaking Aryan-Brahmanas," is being integrated with the folk and "native/non-

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Aryan" belief systems, in search for an indigenous and common "Dravidian" art tradition and style. It is interesting to note that in this search, certain architectural elements like the *gopuram*, *puṣpapoṭika* and *kīrtimukha* have been popularized in secular and sacred spaces, and are understood as representing the authentic Dravidian art peculiar to Tamil Nadu. This research examines the influence of Dravidian movement on temple architecture as well as the traditional architects/*sthapatis*. The analysis is extended further to infer that there are many hybrid styles existing and interacting under the common bracket of Dravidian style, and contemporary architecture does not follow a deterministic pattern that can be defined in time and space.

**Dravid Movement and the Propagation of Temple Arts**

The extent to which the Dravidian identity is naturalized in the society is evident in the following extract from a website on Tamil Nadu. Cited below is an excerpt from www.travelindia.com, which introduces Tamil Nadu as the *Land of Ancient Temples*.

> Tamil Nadu is the home of the Tamils and their Dravidian culture. It is clear that the Tamils, who belong to the Dravidian race, were the first major occupants of the country. . . long before the coming of the Aryans. . . . Temples with towering spires called gopurams are a common feature of this state, seldom seen anywhere else in the country. Temples in Tamil Nadu were the fulcrums of society and even today art forms that have their origin in religious worship continue to colour daily life. . . .
>
> Popularly regarded as the 'Gateway to the South', Chennai presents a culture that is distinctly different from that of northern India. Music, dance and all other art forms of the South are cherished and nurtured in this city which, though industrialized, continues to be traditional and conventional in many ways. . . .

Following the country's independence, the Tamil Nadu government has tried to propagate the importance of Tamil as one of the most ancient languages and "Tamils" as people of a non-Aryan and native origin. The Tamil identity put forth as necessarily different from the Sanskrit identity, which is associated with Brahmins, became a conscious attempt following the Dravidian ideology popularized in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Dravid movement in Tamil Nadu, conceived in the first decades of the twentieth century, propagated nativist and revivalist goals. The main agendas were — to rid the "foreign" Brahmins of the power they enjoyed in the civil as well as religious society, and to restore Tamil society to a presumed pristine state of true equality — which was to be achieved by restoring the Tamil language, literature and art. Temple architecture and sculpture began to be patronized following the government's project of reviving the indigenous cultural past and architectural motifs. They were largely derived from Dravidian temples and also were introduced into secular spaces. Dravidian

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architecture made available to all Hindu communities a notion of authenticity in art tradition and thus became a common expression for the various cults and communities.

### 'Religious' Arts in Secular Spaces

The *gopuram* acquired its association with the secular government, moving beyond its religious connotations, when it was adopted as the regional emblem in 1950s. It is now a common feature in government office facades, official vehicles, awards and gifts — all symbolizing the state. A *gopuram* entrance to a civic space is also seen in civic spaces like The Gandhi Mandapam constructed by the Congress government in 1953. Here, again, architectural motifs generally associated with a temple are placed in a secular setting, to become preservers of the Tamil community's "official cultural memory" (*Pl.* 79).

The two major governments of the DMK and AIADMK political parties, alternatively ruling the present Tamil Nadu and claiming their allegiance to the leaders of the Dravidian movement,[1] continue to patronize the Temple arts to promote the Tamil cultural identity.

> In the post-independence period, the urban space created by the Britishers was used to articulate DMK's version of Tamil identity and history by signifying and resignifying public spaces.[2]

The association of the *Śilpa* tradition with the "authentic" cultural past had interpolated into the society, to become part of the "mass psyche," by 1967, when the DMK government came to power. This political party had to face the problem of maintaining its atheist stance, while glorifying the Tamil heroes using the traditional iconography that is associated with the Hindu religion. There was thus, a conscious attempt to recover Dravidian architecture and literature, from a religious sphere and place it within a larger cultural universe.[3] To cite an example, before the DMK adopted Thiruvalluvar as a symbol for the state buses, departments and awards, the sage-philosopher was depicted as a devotee of Śiva, with Śaivite marks on his body. The political leaders promoted a secular iconography in the depiction of the sage, with their contention that Valluvar's work, having no caste references and religious connotations, should be viewed as an "original" Tamil work. The Śaivite references would betray "Aryan" influences in the Tamil society, and hence its depiction was avoided.

Valluvar Kottam — a memorial in memory of Thiruvalluvar, was designed to function as a civic complex in 1976. The architecture, however, was designed by traditional-architects/*sthapatis* — hence, probably, the ceremonial nature of this "secular" space.

> Valluvar Kottam, the standing memorial to immortal Tamil Poet-Saint Thiruvalluvar is shaped like a temple chariot and is, in fact the replica of the temple chariot in Thiruvarur. A life-size statue of the saint has been installed in the 39-meter tall chariot. The 133 chapters of his famous work 'Thirukkural' have been depicted in bas-relief

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in the front hall corridors of the chariot. . . . Over 3000 blocks of stone were used to create this memorial to Tamil culture.[4]

Architectural features that one would associate with a typical Dravidian temple, today, function as signs ideologically mobilized within the Tamil society. *Gopuram*s and *puṣpapoṭika*s have been officiated into secular spaces, to acquire the meaning of representing a common, traditional, Tamil culture. These temple motifs have been made available to all sections of the society, to be appropriated into many contexts — and hence function as part of the public's visual culture.

**Orientalist Methodology — Its Limitations and the Lack of Contemporaneity**

Examining the contemporary practice makes one realize certain problems in directly applying the orientalist methodology of art historical reading to the study of temple architecture. As for example, the fact that the *sthapati*s do not use a metric scale in their measurements (but subjective scales derived, sometimes, from the patron/*sthapati*'s finger measurements), has proved to be one of the main limitations while studying the proportions of temple architecture. To overcome this, art historians have tried to directly apply their knowledge of texts onto the architecture, to define the architectural space, form and style of various temples. But texts were most probably codified, only after the basic form of architecture had been developed. After the codification, the practised architecture and texts probably contributed to each other simultaneously.

Contemporary practice in Chennai reveals that, the *sthapati*s do not follow the known and translated texts exactly. Most of their knowledge is hereditarily passed on and the practice allows more eclecticism than was credited by oriental theorists. One cannot acknowledge these issues in a study of ancient art, as the records of *sthapati*s are not available to history. However, studying contemporary practice throws light on the importance of this architect-sculptor, whose subjectivity proves to be an indispensable factor in the development and continuation of temple building tradition.

Interacting with a few *sthapati*s involved in the contemporary practice, one understands that their idea of following an authentic style or deviating from it is not exactly similar to a historian's perception of the same. A few of my observations are

- To meet the demands of the society and patron, a *sthapati* tries to authenticate his style and technique as a continuation of the acknowledged "great" styles of the past.

  In many temples built by Muthaiyah *sthapati*, the *devakoṣṭha* pilasters of the main *vimāna* look similar to the early Coḷa examples while the pillars of the *mukha maṇḍapa* and the *gopuram* belong to the Vijayanagara and Nāyaka styles. The Vijayanagara influence is, however, denied probably because temple arts — promoted as insulated and inherent to the Tamil land, is attributed entirely to the Pallavas and Coḷas who define the greatness of the society's past.

- The *sthapati*s I have interacted with, classify temple styles regionally. The architecture of

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temples in the regions of Kumbakonam, Madurai and Kanchipuram are classified as Coḷa, Pāṇḍya and Pallava styles respectively. Hence while following the Coḷa style, the temples of Tanjavur are considered. The fact that many Coḷa temples have Nāyaka renovations in their *maṇḍapa*s and *gopuram*s, is not of relevance to a *sthapati* as it is for an art historian. This could be one explanation for Muthaiyah *sthapati*'s style.

- While using an earlier temple as a model, the *sthapati* modifies it according to the patron's requirement, budget, materials available and his own technical skills. It can further be inferred that, the *sthapati*s incorporate into the architecture, a personal style that is discernable in some standard architectural elements.

The *gopuram* superstructure of the Kāmākṣī Amman temple of Kanchipuram, renovated during the Vijayanagara period, was further renovated by Muthaiyah *sthapati* in 1970s (*Pl.* 80). He was also asked to imitate the temple in the Mandavali area of Chennai, by a private patron (*Pl.* 82).

The *sthapati* has not followed in his renovations at Kanchipuram, the earlier type of pilasters that can be seen in the base structure of the *gopuram*. The *puṣpapoṭika* — a typical Vijayanagara feature, is discarded for an early Coḷa type pilaster. In the Mandavali Kāmākṣī Amman temple, the same *sthapati* has imitated only the shrine placements of the Kanchipuram example, to signify to the patron the authenticity of the imitation.

My reason for explaining the difference between the *sthapatis* idea of the Dravidian style and a historian's formalistic perception of the same, is to point out the contemporary style that is recognized and accepted within the society as the "indigenous" "Dravidian" style.

**Infiltration of the Dravidian Ideology into the Institution of *Sthapatis***

> This magnificent statue of Thiruvalluvar is the only piece of art fully made up of granite stone . . . strictly following the principles of traditional stone carving and assembling technology that germinated and flourished in the land of Tamil Nadu. . . . The traditional corbelling technique adopted in all temple vimānas or gopuras. . . has been very ably and successfully pressed into service.

Says the article on a journal of *Vāstu Puruṣa*, edited by V. Ganapathi Sthapati. The article is a report on the Thiruvalluvar statue, constructed in Kanya-Kumari,

> dedicated to the nation on the 1st January 2000, by the Honorable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Kalaigner, M. Karunanidhi — the benevolent patron of art and architecture.

This writing, published in 2001, explains in detail, the traditional modes of construction and proportions that the *sthapati* has followed "authentically" for the statue.

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"All these expensive memorial and iconographical projects were argued for, as revival of traditional crafts and craftsmen," says A. Srivatsan.[5] He goes on to explain how Karunanidhi goes as far as rewriting a Tamil epic, *Śilapaddikāram* to change the villain of the story from a *Viśvakarman*/ goldsmith (which was the *sthapati* community in the ancient society), to a soldier who belonged to a relatively upper class.

In Tamil Nadu, with different political and cultural forces appropriating temple architecture to communicate their ideology, the institution of *sthapati*s becomes an important consideration. The Government College of Architecture and Sculpture, in Mamallapuram, offers a four-year B.Tech degree, in traditional temple architecture. This college, described as the pioneer institution imparting training and education, in different branches of temple arts, was started in 1957 as part of the Industrial and Commerce section of the government. In 1991, it was shifted to the art and cultural department of the government. Since then it is being patronized as a cultural institution, aiding "to promote Tamil and Tamil Nadu's art."[6] A secretary, working in the college, pointed out a few problems faced currently, by the administration faculty, which can be interpreted as the interpolation of Dravidian ideology into this institution, through the Government of Tamil Nadu.

One of the issues expressed was that, there are few in the college who believe that *Śāstra*s and *Āgama*s should be taught in Sanskrit. The secretary himself, belonging to the Brahmin community, believes that a Sanskrit base necessarily authenticates a *sthapati*. He also says that, his views, if voiced would create problems "from the government and the Tamil students" — both subscribing to the view that temple arts belong to Tamil Nadu where the medium of instruction should be in Tamil.

Also, the college is asking to be linked to the Anna University so that it would acquire the status of a technical institute. But this preposition is being denied, as the government desires to promote the college as a cultural and traditional institution, and not as a technical and production oriented college.

The students of this college have freelanced for many secular projects, and in many cases, during the term of their course — though not mediated by the college. The college authorities also claim that the "VGP" project was by one of their graduates. The VGP Golden beach resort is an amusement park and beach resort complex which is a popular tourist location on the outskirts of Chennai. Two pillars with *puṣpapoṭika*s flank the entrance of the resort, beside which a *vimāna*-like structure serves to carry the signboard. The *puṣpapoṭika* and *vimāna* motifs, used decoratively, makes one wonder if these elements of temple architecture were appropriated to promote and display the Tamil culture and identity — to be associated with this tourist setup.

However, there seems to be a contradiction of ideologies, in this sort of defining the Tamil identity through the Dravidian temple architecture. V. Ganapathi Sthapati, who built the Thiruvalluvar statue for a "secular," egalitarian cause also says that the architecture prescribed by the *Śilpa* texts

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has divine origins, and the *Viśvakarman* acts as the mediator who realizes this divine form materially. The *sthapati* justifies his metaphysical notions, by arguing for a pan-Indianness in the concept underlying the temple architecture. He considers texts to be universal tools, thereby denying temple types any roots.

He compares the science of temple architecture, to the art of many ancient civilizations, and to Einstein's theory of relativity — in order to point out the timeless sacredness underlying the proportional systems prescribed in *Śilpa* texts. Hence he believes that this ancient science can be applied to any context and all forms of architecture. He further states that, "I am a pre-historic man. You cannot historicize me."

His knowledge of the ancient science of architecture and his lineage as a *Viśvakarman*, according to him, makes his temples "authentic" and "sacred." When asked about the temples built by *sthapatis*, lacking the above two, he says that he does not consider those "buildings as Temples." It seems like the Dravidian temple architecture, in the postcolonial Tamil Nadu is dictated by communities, which can claim authentic knowledge and mastery of the traditional art, through their ancestry. The "style" thus defined, explains the homogeneity of "taste" — in the continuation and appropriation of certain forms, from the architecture of the past by the *sthapati* community.

**Popular Cults in Tamil Nadu**

"A decade back, we could do an election campaign without visiting a temple. But today, voters expect us to stop at every roadside temple. When your intention is to get votes, your ideology has to take a back seat,"[7] says a senior minister of the State. It can be observed that to justify their party ideologies as following the Dravidian ideology, the political leaders openly favour only the cults that can be defended as being popular with the lower castes.

Stalin M. Karunanidhi, the DMK president's son, visited the Bangaramman temple when the DMK was in power in 1997, and this created a major uproar in the state. Stalin could justify his religiosity by claiming to have only favoured the *ādi parāśakti* cult. A cult which was founded by Bangaru Adigalar — who was a school teacher from the backward Vanniyar caste. This cult has a huge following amongst the rural population as it channels its resources into education and charitable works.

In contemporary Chennai, most of the roadside shrines are dedicated to the Amman goddess, Gaṇeśa and Hanumān cults who share a universal appeal, amongst all Hindu communities in the city. The temples, which functioned as purely Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite temples, in the late medieval years, are being renovated. And, in most cases, the renovation includes additional shrines of the above-mentioned "popular" cults.

Small shrines on the main roads and intersections, and large-scale temples are being built for the Amman goddess, in the city. This goddess, who is gaining mass following in Chennai, was integrated

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into the Hindu pantheon, during the "Sankritization" process, by appropriating the *śaktis* of Śiva. The Kālī and Durgā incarnations have been given the status of being Śiva's wives in many local legends. Today, amongst the Chennai public, many Brahmin women also take Amman as an extension of Ambal, the consort of Viṣṇu. Visiting the Durga-Amman shrine every Tuesday is a practice followed by many women, irrespective of their caste and community. Hence, the construction of Amman shrines has become a common practice in many temples. The rituals and the modes of worship followed by the various communities remains different even today, but the deities worshipped, their iconography, the architectural space and motifs — are all becoming increasingly common to all social classes of the Hindu public.

*Pl.* 82 shows a *gopuram* of the Ellai Amman[8] temple built by P. Sambhandham in 1990. The temple is a small complex, with this *gopuram* as its only towering element, facing the road. This *gopuram*, when compared to the *vimāna* of Aṣṭalakṣmī temple bulit by Muthaiyah Sthapati in 1978 (*Pl.* 81), the similarity in the polychromatic colours and iconography of the woman-guardians as relief sculptures, becomes evident. The Amman and Lakṣmī goddesses seem equally popular in their respective areas, with different socio-economic classes irrespective of the temple scale, design or cult.

The *sthapatis* in both cases have followed a similar iconography, *sari*, and ornamentation, to represent the guardian goddesses in relief. The accepted iconography further appears similar to the Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī representations in Raja Ravi Varma's oleographs.

The temples under the Coḷa and Nāyaka patronage must have been controlled only by the few privileged communities — in terms of making decisions about the *sthapati* employed, shrines incorporated and economic sanctions. The recent temples, on the other hand, do not claim a status of "high art," but try to include many cults, resulting in the temple becoming a common sacred space for all Hindu communities. Also, unlike the medieval times, the present individual patrons or groups are not so sectarian in the cults they worship.

Shri Devi Ellaiamman Alayam, a temple built by the local fishermen in the Besantnagar area of Chennai, is officiated by the same priests who are employed in the Varasiddhi Vinayakar temple patronized by the Hindu Dharma Paripala Trust of the area. The cult, caste and economic class difference in both these temples are united in the common architectural features of the Dravidian style which represents the "authentic" cultural past for both the temple patrons and followers.

*Pls.* 83 & 84 belong to the Shri Devi Ellaiamman temple and Varasiddhi Vinayakar temple (built by Viśwanāthan Sthapati in 1979), respectively. The *gaṇa* figure posing as a guardian is a feature seen even in Pallava temples. The recent *gaṇa* figures, however, portray Dravidian features and dark skin, probably as a conscious attempt to reiterate the indigenous aspect in the art.

**Deviations from Dravidian Identity**

There are temples built in the city without the supervision of a *sthapati* and all the Hindu temples do

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not necessarily follow the Dravidian style of architecture. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (*fig.* 8), began as an information center that was converted to a prayer hall in 1969. Due to its initial conception as an information centre, a *sthapati* did not supervise this temple. The tiled prayer hall housing a cement idol of Veṅkateśvara, is one of the most popular and visited shrines in the area of T-Nagar. A relief carving of a *vimāna* motif on the façade is the only element, which signifies the shrine within.

Recently, many communities have collectively commissioned temples, reflecting gathered notions of Hindu identity. In many cases, this identity deviates from the traditional Tamil identity — being signified by Dravidian style architecture. The architecture of some of these community temples, are not restricted by strict codes of *Śilpa* practice, in their plan and elevation. However, they propagate the Vedāntic approach to religion through many cultural activities.

The Nandalala Temple, dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, can be cited as an example. V. Ganapathi Sthapati built this temple in 1996 and has combined both the Dravid and Nāgara style of architecture for this project. The local people refer to this prominent Nāgara-type *vimāna*, as the "Birla Mandir type." The temple began as a cultural centre, and is not called a "temple," with an intention to signify a common sacred ground for all communities. It is introduced as follows in www.nandalala.org: "Sri Nandalala Cultural Centre, a new children's growth center in Chennai, gives a novel Vedic touch to its curriculum."

Other examples of such temples, defining an alternative Hindu identity, are the Ramakrishna Maṭh temples and the ISKON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness) temples, in the city. Architects and engineers from mainstream colleges have designed these projects, where *sthapatis* have been employed to mainly supervise the religious rituals associated with the building process, and the ornamental motifs.

The fact that a temple's strength does not necessarily depend on its architecture, is further evident in the popularity of many tree shrines and small roadside shrines. It can probably be concluded that, popular beliefs lead to the patronage of temple constructions — whose size and embellishments depend on economic and cultural limitations.

The water tank of the Varasiddhi Vinayakar temple is a modern construction made sacred by the relief sculptures of river goddesses, the figure of a Nandī on top, and the bell attached to the tank. The motor and pipeline do not stop a worshipper from circumambulating this structure. If this tank is compared to the *kuṇḍa* (tank) of a medieval temple, it becomes evident that the *sthapati* plays an important role in defining the contemporary style. A style innovated by appropriating older traditions and values, to suit modern technology, materials and budget constraints. *Puṣpapoṭikas*, *vyāli* piers and *kīrtimukhas* seem to be popular decorative elements in the city, where they have been incorporated in many secular and sacred buildings, invoking the traditional culture of the "Tamils."

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## Conclusion

The contemporary practice of Tamil temple architecture, operating within a complex web of interactive interfaces created by the media, is being appropriated and propagated in different contexts — to signify many socio-political ideologies. These different contexts and significations are constantly interacting and influencing each other, through media, tourist locations, State sponsored/private, secular/sacred architectural projects. The different combinations of common audiences also mediate the exchanges.

In this process, the tradition is being codified in *sthapati*'s notes, academic programmes, internet sites, print and television media and history, to be continued by the next generation of disciples. The contemporary style practised, is thus, not a linear continuation of earlier tradition of this southern region. Nor is it only following certain fixed codifications provided by the known and translated texts.

Also, this process of continuing the past Dravidian tradition is not unique and restricted to the region of Tamil Nadu, as there are communities all over the country and the world, patronizing the tradition of building Dravidian temples. The ideas of "authenticity" and "identity", defined by the Hindu diaspora patronizing south Indian temple tradition elsewhere, would necessitate the examination of a totally different set of socio-political ideologies and practices, an exercise, which may result in the discovery of new hybrid styles contributing to this tradition and practice.

The interactions and exchanges of the various Hindu communities and ideologies, spreading to all over the world, thanks to the interconnectedness of the web, causes a situation where one can only speculate about the varieties of temple styles and significations that can be generated and practiced.

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'Indian politics and thereby Congress, was and has been in the hands of mainly brahmins and elite non-brahmins. However, due to the reason that religious and caste minorities make up most of the vote bank, Congress built up an image of being a Secular party for minorities to ensure its victory', reports a website on Tamil Nadu politics. In southern India, even before Independence, a radical Secular movement, led by E.V. Ramaswamy, was in full wing. It advocated total abolishment of caste system (and Hinduism) and renaissance of Tamil/Dravidian literature and its past greatness.

The Dravid Kazhagam (DK) was founded in 1944 with the main intent to educate the mass (lower castes) of the oppression that Hindus placed on them. DK was led by leaders like, E.V. Ramaswamy and C.N. Annadurai.

Due to personal and political difference these two leaders split into two groups. Annadurai (and 75 per cent of the DK) left to form the Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and entered politics in 1956. M.G. Ramachandran, who was initially the DMK treasurer, left the party to set up the rival Anna Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK), claiming allegiance to Annadurai. In 1977, he renamed his

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party AIDMK — All India Anna Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam in alliance with Indira Gandhi's Congress party, and won Tamil Nadu elections.

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8. 'Ellai' in Tamil means border. In Chennai there are many Ellai Amman shrines built bordering streets and highways.

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# 21

# On Signature and Citizenship: Further notes on the 'Husain Affair'

*Karin Zitzewitz*

Amongst the major artists of the postcolonial period, M.F. Husain has held, and assiduously maintained, the distinction as the artist who speaks for the nation. His life-long project as a painter has been to embrace the diversity of the Indian nation, remold it in his images, and represent it in painting. He has worked most successfully through images of national icons, in the common sense of the term. His subjects have ranged from Mahatma Gandhi to Indira Gandhi, from Mother Theresa to Raj Kapoor, but his main work has been to represent women — anonymous and not — as the soul of the nation. Each of these icons is meant to signify, metonymically and by sheer accumulation, the nation itself, interpreted through his characteristic style.

Critical discourse about Husain has identified his use of a thick black line as the key component of his style.[1] Despite Husain's constant shifting of media, subject, and mode of painting, critics claim that his use of line — of drawing — has remained central and constant. While one could argue that line has not, in fact, been used in a wholly consistent fashion throughout Husain's career, in Husain criticism, line becomes crucial to stylistic recognition.[2] *Saraswati*, a 1978 drawing which was included in Dyaneshwar Nadkarni's study of Husain, is an example of the characteristic mannerism of Husain's line. It is also the image that gained notoriety at the centre of the 1996 "Husain affair." On the basis of the "offensiveness" of that drawing, a gallery of his work was attacked in Ahmedabad and he was accused of obscenity and offending religious sentiment.[3]

On one level, this affair was political in the strictest sense: a conflict between a minority representative of the secularist left wing and the Hindu nationalist right wing. It emerged from the close mapping of the terms "modern" and "secular," a relationship that holds pride of place in secular ideology. The attack on Husain was an attack on the kind of "modern," "secular" India in which a Muslim is not circumscribed by his religious identity into a domain completely separate from all symbols claimed by Hindutva. It was an attack on a Muslim artist who crossed a designated line. This was the basic — and intended, it is clear — political interpretation of the affair.

The problem is that to end our interpretation there does not allow for any attention to the domain in which that line was drawn; in none of the reactions to this affair was there room for

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critique of the image itself, of the domain of modern art, or of its relationship to various public spheres. The "affair" demands an interpretation that acknowledges the links between these three. This paper works toward that goal by connecting the concepts of signature and artistic persona available to Husain to the changing possibilities of citizenship in postcolonial India. It intends both to mark and to attempt to conceptualize the sea change in the public sphere that determined the form taken by the "Husain affair". In so doing, I wish to inhabit the critical space opened up by Nicholas Dirks in his reading of a similar debate about Maniratnam's film, *Roja*. Echoing Christopher Pinney's introduction to Dirks' piece, I wish to write not from "the position of . . . Hindutva . . . or of Indian intellectuals for whom criticism operated within very specific constraints," but instead from a space of re-evaluation and critique rather than reaction and solidarity.[4]

In this paper, I argue that the "Husain affair" can best be interpreted by examining Husain's artistic persona both critically and historically. Husain's artistic persona has at its centre a notion of heroic creativity that values artistic promiscuity and authorial control over its products. I argue that within this masterfully drawn persona one may discern a fundamental anxiety or insecurity about the institution of authorship. Through recourse to particular practices of citation and repetition, Husain unknowingly calls into question the sovereign artistic subject he has so meticulously cultivated.

I will then link this paradoxical structure within Husain's artistic persona to the changing contours of the modern Indian public sphere. The early postcolonial structure of citizenship balanced particularity (individuation) with a nationalist homogeneity; it was a structure which only allowed for a limited, and strictly secondary, possibility of community identity. As exemplary members of a modern and secular elite, artists of this period were given a pedagogical role as auteurs or "super-citizens." The conclusion of this paper proposes that the "Husain affair" is symptomatic of changing possibilities of authorial identity within a new public sphere. The citizenship which allowed Husain to flourish as the exemplary author finds itself threatened with extinction when faced by the rise of a new regime of representation which compensates for the democratization of media through a stricter regime of control over the rights of authors — narrowly defined by community — over signs.

**On Husain**

The drawing was deemed to be obscene because it depicted Sarasvatī in the nude, however chaste. Husain's *Saraswati* sits with her genitals protected by her *vīṇā*, surrounded by her attributes, hair blowing in the wind. Her body is lean, her breasts like those of a young girl. Her face is blank except for a large *tilaka*. The image has a kind of lightness and movement that comes with Husain's style. It is a good example of his breezy, quick images, which form a large part of his oeuvre after the mid-1970s. It is, unmistakably a "Husain." His signing of his paintings whether in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Chinese, or Roman script is usually redundant, for his line is so recognisable. As a "Husain," its life is framed (not least by the artist himself) as a contribution to a large body of work attached to his personality.

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Much has been made of this artistic persona. From his beginning in the Progressive Artists Group in the late 1940s, Husain has engaged in self-mythologization. But his artistic persona reached its maturity in the mid-1970s, when he began to be an important society artist.[5] Since then, Husain has often been described as a "showman," a term which carries equal parts of megalomania and entertainment value, and whose prototype is Raj Kapoor. To own a piece of Husain is to own part of a myth: born in a feudal Bohra Muslim household, Husain rose from an itinerant life as a signboard-painter on the streets of Bombay to become the quintessential Indian artist, alone capable of representing — of painting — the entire nation of India. By the 1990s, Husain had residences and/or collections of his work in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Delhi and Bombay and was a frequent ambassador for Indian art to London and the United States. It is not an exaggeration to say that Husain has attempted to personally *be the nation of India*. This myth has been propagated by much of the writing about Husain since the 1970s, including and especially Nadkarni's *Husain: Riding the Lightning*.

Husain's persona has been achieved by adapting the formula of artistic genius of which Picasso is the ultimate example to serve not just a universal ideal of art, but a particular national ideal.[6] Husain is very often compared to Picasso, which he seems to find tiresome, but which is appropriate especially for the issue of the signatory power of individual style. Although Picasso is well known for his simultaneous pursuit of a number of styles, like Husain, his drawn line is seen to be the key to his "magic." This line contributes to their extraordinarily sensitive ability to capture the human figure, especially the female nude. Like Picasso, Husain has cultivated a heroic masculinity — based in no small part upon a reputation for promiscuity (deserved or not) — which allows him to claim the ability to capture specifically Indian womanhood through his sensitivity as an artist.[7] *Gaja Gamini* is his latest experiment with this concept.[8] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, in her paper on the "Husain affair," attempts to problematize the role of nudity in the episode, but she does so without examining the part played by the successful realisation of female nudes in the production of the persona of the modern artist.[9]

Although Guha-Thakurta takes the establishment of what she calls a "separate sacred world of art" as her object of study, the terms in which she describes Husain's *Saraswati* adopt the rhetoric of that separate sphere. Contrasting his *Saraswati* to "gross" calendar art abstracted from Ravi Varma's work, Husain's nudes, "in their stylised lines, colours, and contours, stand out as eminently artistic, each image bearing the unmistakable insignia of the master's style." Both she and Monica Juneja counter the possible eroticism of Husain's *Saraswati*, citing her "bony angles" (TG-T) and "strain and discomfort" (MJ).[10] Both writers imply an intention on Husain's part to de-eroticize this image, interpreting her lack of facial features as a denial of the erotic gaze. They claim that to de-eroticize, here, is to place the female nude into the space of art rather than erotica/pornography, but in so doing, they paper over the complex role of eroticism — or the control over its representation — in the high modernist idea of art within which Husain has

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framed his work. In effect, Guha-Thakurta and Juneja defend the boundaries of the discursive structure they set out to critique.

While in his *Saraswati* Husain employed the very modern device of using Hindu mythology as a source for his own individual expression, his drawing must also be taken seriously as an intervention in public discourse about the goddess outside the self-consciously secular frame of modern art. Husain has always maintained the contemporaneity of mythological material. His images of gods and goddesses tend to energise conventional depictions of figures by capturing them in mid-gesture. Juneja and Guha-Thakurta's stress on the mannerism of the *Saraswati* image points to this tendency of Husain's work. Indeed, in most situations, these interventions are extremely well-received. For example, the images of Gaṇeśa included in Husain's *Ashta Vinayaka* limited edition reproductions for Jet Airways' *Jet Mall* catalog, depict Gaṇeśa in a series of energetic postures.[11]

Since the 1960s, Husain has flirted with other conceptions of the artist's role, drawn from pop art and film. But in each of these interventions, Husain never actually abandons the exceptionality afforded by the artistic persona. For instance, regardless of the aesthetic experimentation of his film, *Through the Eyes of a Painter*, the title betrays Husain's commitment to the privileged form of seeing expected of and assigned to the artist.[12] Anshuman Das Gupta and Shivaji Panikkar use this logic to describe Husain's 1960s "Happenings," or attempts to make his work directly in the public sphere (e.g., Husain painting a trademark horse on a restaurant tablecloth using sauce as his medium). They write that Husain directly fed

> into the heroic megalomanic space of the modern occupied by the modernistic artistic persona. . . . The constant attempt of calling back the mythic reference of the creation of the world and equating it with the creation of works of art is demonstration of the same.[13]

I would add that his insistence upon remaining in this heroic space is a manifestation of anxiety over stylistic recognition and the inevitable loss of control over representation as he is separated from his work. Regardless of the role of line, the one true constant of Husain's work is his preoccupation with his own authorship. It is in recognition of this fact, and of its limitations, that I concentrate upon the concept of signature.

## On Signature

Jacques Derrida discusses the phenomenon of the signature as part of "Signature, Event, Context," a redefinition of writing in which he discusses the possibility of contexts of acts of communication.[14] To refer to the context of an act of communication, Derrida writes, is to assume the singularity of the event and the presence of both an addressor (the speaker/writer) and an addressee (the listener/reader). He questions the possibility of determining a "context" — temporal or social — by pointing out the problems posed to these assumptions by writing. Within Derridean writing, neither the

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assumption of singularity nor of presence holds. Instead, Derrida proposes that all communication, like all writing, actually presupposes an absence rather than confirms a presence. For Derrida, the logic of writing, which underwrites all representation, can actually question the assumptions underlying those processes of representation.

I have found it useful to simply think of Husain's painting as a form of Derridean writing. The written sign, Derrida writes, is "a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription." Further, as a rule, writing must be repeatable both in the absence of and beyond the life of the "empirically determined subject" who produced it. The event of writing is thus never discrete — there is no such thing as a code which cannot be and has not already been repeated. The written sign necessarily breaks forth from its context, i.e., from the moment, space, and presences that characterised its inscription. This break is not a byproduct of writing, but a necessary part of its structure. While there is a moment of the emergence of a mark, Derrida insists that it is immediately separated from all forms of a present referent (meaning, the subjective or objective "source" of the mark).

The question is raised, then, as to how Husain's painting both operates within and resists these aspects of writing. In a number of ways, Husain's painting stresses the iterability or repeatability of writing. Husain paints within a complex structure of citation of a collection of motifs designated as "Indian tradition," "mythology," or, very occasionally, "history." His painting relies not only upon the legibility of those elements but also upon their very repetition. Husain takes as his brief the citation, juxtaposition, and remolding of existing elements through his style. So, too, he stresses the iterability of his own presence through his remarkable profusion of painting. There is a function to his promiscuity.

But his constant reiteration of authorial/artistic presence through the proliferation of his work is also a sign of his resistance to the 'spacing' of his writing, by which Derrida means the immediate separation of his work from its subjective origin, or from himself as artist. Husain's employment of the signature — both in terms of the signature-as-line and the artist's signature itself — can be seen as a way of fixing the work of art to the artist. But as Derrida points out, the signature has an ambiguous ability to fix:

> By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (maintenance). This general maintenance is somehow inscribed, stapled to present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. . . . For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.

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But, he writes further,

> In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production.[15]

Many readers of Derrida have used this passage to discuss forgery, or the possibility hidden within every signature of its being only an imitation and not the proof of presence it is assumed to be. With Husain, there is a similar kind of anxiety that motivates both his preoccupation with stylistic recognition through line and his play with, but insistence upon, the written signature.

Earlier in this paper, I noted the redundant nature of Husain's signature. Why must he sign, when he relies upon such a recognizable style? Clearly, the signature is a part of Husain's theoretical programme. His alternative signatures in various scripts — dependant, perhaps, upon where he is painting — clearly violate the dictates of the signature, which can support no deviance from the "original" form. If Husain is positing the equivalence of these signatures, then he is making a statement about his relationship to language, positing its fully transparent convertibility. For all his play with the form of his signature, however, on the whole, Husain is deeply committed to claiming his works by signing them. His obsession with signature becomes, at times, its own parody, with Husain signing again the 'Jet Mall' limited edition reproductions, even though the prints include reproductions of the "original" signatures from the water colours. This second signature is still more evidence of the artist's presence, though at a secondary form of creation, sanctifying an object that could easily be dismissed as a crude imitation of an original.

This double signature also plays with the time delay inherent in reproductions. Time plays a similar role in Derrida's definition of signature. The grammatical form of "having-been present in a past now" combines frozen contemporaneity and necessary pastness. The temporal separation is marked by the signature because in painting the signature is generally thought of as being the last gesture of the artist, the gesture which dates the painting and closes the event of its creation. Indeed, that assumption is pointed to by the anxiety of galleries and auction houses about painters signing the work at a later date, or other such irregularities. The signature claims a painting for an artist's body of work, but it also sets it afield as a piece of writing irrefutably separated from the authorial/artistic presence. So, too, the signature pinpoints the event of the painting, but it also releases the painting into Derrida's "transcendental form of nowness." This is a crucial aspect of the Husain "affair," where *Saraswati* was judged by some as a contemporary act and by some as a closed event within an artist's body of work. The difficulty, and necessity, of looking at Husain historically — of charting his career within a larger arc of social possibilities — is pointed to by this problem of signature.

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**On Citizenship**

In his *Frontline* interview, Husain placed his "affair" within a series of events in which Indian artists had been censured for their depictions of the female nude.[16] The 1949 "Newton Affair" concerned the appearance of Francis Newton Souza's nudes in the Bombay Art Society annual exhibition; his paintings were considered inappropriate to display in public, in the possible view of women and children. He was simply asked to take them down, which he, of course, refused to do. In a more elaborate case, charges were filed against Akbar Padamsee for his depiction and exhibition of female nudes in his 1952 *Lovers* series. The court ruled in his favour in 1956, after elaborate arguments by Karl Khandalawala and others about the place of the female nude in modern art. In the case of Padamsee, the "separate sacred world of art" was retained as the appropriate realm in which to judge the alleged obscenity. Husain's *Saraswati*, whether by the intention of the artist or not, could not remain in that realm. While this does have something to do with Husain's deliberate intervention in discourse about the goddess, I propose that a more useful account would chart the historical difference between a public sphere in which assertions of artistic freedom are sufficient and one in which they are not quite.

In her discussion of the "affair" and the public sphere, Monica Juneja records its general interpretation as a conflict between a heterogeneous nationalist narrative supported by Husain and the homogenising narrative of Hindutva. She writes, ". . . the right to critique and to creatively interpret tradition needs to be defended against the forcible clamping down of one single meaning on any dimension of tradition." One would be defending the "open society", the "space which allows complex identities, of artists and communities, to emerge and find expression."[17] In her discussion of the public sphere, Juneja draws upon Jürgen Habermas, whose theory relies upon a remarkably optimistic view of the openness of public debate. Juneja admits that the freedom of artistic expression could only come in a society free from censorship and open to serious interventions in "cultural transactions." Habermasian assumptions of free debate are contingent upon a concept of a sovereign subject the theoretical and historical possibility of which has been strongly challenged from all sides, including and especially through the critique of Michel Foucault.

Even for our much more limited purposes here — and using only empirical data — it is possible to expose the fallacy of the opposition between an early postcolonial heterogeneity and a post-Hindutva homogeneity. Husain is a particularly useful site from which to argue that although the early national model of citizenship had much more room for particularity than the one offered recently by the Hindu right, it was no less homogenizing in the end.

Ravi Vasudevan has recently outlined the history of the social field of film in postcolonial India in three stages: from a single auteur who speaks for the nation, through an avant-garde movement advocating social change, to an overwhelming popular cinema.[18] Satyajit Ray, the obvious choice of auteur in film, is both very similar to and very different from Husain. The most important of the

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similarities in both Ray's work and persona is his balance of particularity within a more universal and unifying project of nation building. Though for quite a long time, Ray's was the single Indian filmic voice on the international stage, his was the voice of the Bengali bhadralok.[19] For the period of his dominance of Indian film, a very particular part was allowed to speak for the whole nation. Simultaneously, Husain, though consistently identified as part of a religious minority, was also allowed to stand in for the nation.[20] Both figures operate under a double movement of heterogeneity within an overarching homogeneity.

This double movement, in which particularity is contained within a larger, homogenizing national narrative, is underscored by the way in which Husain's minority identity is cast. Husain's position as a Muslim is further particularized by his designation as a member of the Sulemani Bohra community. This is seen as significant, in Husain's case, because of his famous representation of Karbala and his interest in Muharram, which is a "natural" result of his being raised in a Shi'a home.[21] Nadkarni places importance on Husain's Muslim identity only in sections about his childhood — what he calls the "morbid religiosity of his youth" — finding subconscious reflections of calligraphy or *tazia* processions in Husain's later works.[22] While Nadkarni's text obsessively minoritizes Husain, it also particularizes him within the minority, separating him from a Muslim mainstream. His childhood in the "feudal" states of Indore and Baroda further exoticizes Husain for Nadkarni.[23] Not only is Husain's engagement with Islam particularized to be somehow separate from a greater minority discourse, but it is also seen as part of a *past* made remote both in his biography and by its association with the "feudal" states erased by post-independent India.

While the subsuming of particularity within universality was the basis of the early postcolonial idea of citizenship, Husain and Ray were placed in an even more precious and precarious position in the developing state. In his discussion of the changing character of the Indian public sphere, Partha Chatterjee has made a distinction between a colonial and early postcolonial civil society characterized by a pedagogical project of modernization and a later form of political society.[24] It is clear that figures like Husain and Ray had a particularly pedagogical role to play in the developing state, where they had recourse to an identity even more universal than the nation, that of the artist.[25] Artistic freedom was to the freedom of expression what Husain was to the common citizen of India, an exaggerated form — a super-citizen, with roots simultaneously within the nation and exceeding it.[26] In another double movement, there was an expectation that the artist simultaneously support the homogenizing narrative of the early postcolonial Indian state and work against it, though, ironically, the artist's challenge was always neutralized by his privileged position *vis-à-vis* the state.[27]

As I mentioned above, in the 1970s there was a transition in Husain's position from the auteur to a media personality. While this transition did follow particular changes in Husain's artistic career, it also paralleled a shift in the public sphere which provided a strong challenge to these two double movements. In a discussion of television, Arvind Rajagopal hinges his periodization of postcolonial history upon the expansion of the media, particularly the event of the *Rāmāyaṇa* serial in the 1980s

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and the later emergence of cable television.[28] These roughly coincide with the rise of Hindu nationalist politics and, eventually, liberalization. His argument balances a technological-determinism about the democratizing power of television with a particular history of that democratization, which he links to the representational forms of religiosity present in the *Rāmāyaṇa* serial. Rajagopal's model is convincing because it allows for the combination of a homogenizing narrative such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and a concept of democratization. Key to this concept of change is the power of television to reach an individuated, desiring subject.

The question is which aspect of the change outlined by Rajagopal is most important for interpreting the "Husain affair"? Is it the linking of a new democratization with certain forms of religiosity — forms which operate under a distinctly different system of citation than that valorized by Husain — or is it a transformation of the relationship between "super-citizens" — auteurs — like Husain and everyday citizens? Quite clearly, it is a complicated combination of both.

The problem of eroticism that Guha-Thakurta posed in her essay on the "affair" — why Ravi Varma-esque, plainly titillating goddesses are somehow entirely inoffensive when Husain's unerotic modernist *Saraswati* strikes a chord — has to do with newly conservative strictures of citation. The startling increase in the circulation of images is part of the acceleration, and with it the loss of control against which Hindutva, as a movement, has organized. In the new form of religiosity produced by Hindu nationalism, a shrinking number of image-types have become fully recognizable. The attack on Husain can be interpreted as part of this attempt to limit or assert control over representation. Concomitant with this is the new vulnerability of the "separate sacred world of art," that world supported by a homogenizing nationalist narrative that not only maps the modern onto the secular but invests itself into certain "super-citizens" that come to stand — in all their particularity — for both of those terms. *Something* has happened that has blocked the earlier "double movements" that protected heterogeneity and particularity within homogeneity.

In a recent lecture, Ashish Rajadhyaksha linked that *something* to consumption and to the democratization of desire.[29] In place of the earlier auteur or "super-citizen" model, he offered the fable of the "chief guest." He invited his audience to imagine a function or performance of some kind to which a "chief guest" had been invited. A common audience member watches both the event itself and the chief guest, desiring both what is happening on stage and the privileged place of spectatorship occupied by the chief guest. Rajadhyaksha poses the complex of desire and spectatorship present at this function as the mode of citizenship operative in India today. For our purposes, Rajadhyaksha's provocative model of citizenship begs an elaboration of how the "chief guest" is different from the auteur.

I would propose that the "chief guest" is a significant transformation of the older form of auteur. The pedagogical aspect of the auteur/citizen is still present in the mediating power of the "chief guest." But the power of mediation and creation is no longer exclusively held by the auteur. The

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currents of desire at the "function" run both through the "chief guest" and around him. It is also clear that the "chief guest" is a category more or less empty of content — a matter of position rather than exceptionality. The "chief guest" must be at one with the audience even as he rises above it. Herein lies the particularly relevant form of historical change. It seems that the "chief guest" cannot carry the same sort of particularities that were built into the structure of the auteur.

This transformation of ideal citizenship makes it difficult for Husain to sustain his project of mediating, reinterpreting, and representing the nation. But despite the violence of the campaign against him and his continued persecution, it has not made it impossible for him to operate as an artist. There are two reasons for this. First, the transformation of the Indian public sphere in the past two decades has been neither complete nor uncontested. There is still quite a bit of secular/modern space left for Husain. But this is not the only space in which he operates. I have repeatedly referred to his 'Jet Ṃall' series of Gaṇeśa posters in order to highlight Husain's position squarely at the centre of a new and accelerated form of consumption, both of the material art object and of the media spectacle of celebrity. Whereas the social theory of Rajagopal — like election studies — strongly links Hindutva with liberalization, practices of consumption do not seem to be quite so consistent.

Some of the more bizarre reactions to the Husain "affair" can be explained by acknowledging the newly central position of the consumption of media spectacle, in which Husain's persecution by Hindutva activists and the state has been portrayed as a "Pop political event."[30] Shortly after the burning of his gallery in Ahmedabad, the design magazine *Inside/Outside* profiled Husain's foray into furniture design:

> Always creating a media storm — be it for his series on actress Madhuri Dixit or the latest furore over his depiction of Goddess Saraswati, there is no denying that versatility seems to be this grand master's middle name. Husain always seems to be one step ahead of everybody. . . .[31]

In the face of both Hindutva's desire to control the form and content of representation and the left discourse of artistic freedom — both positions committed to investing value in the "affair" — these reactions completely evacuate all meaning from the incident. Instead, it becomes a mere recapitulation of Husain's special position as "one to watch."

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1. See Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, *Husain: Riding the Lightning* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1996), 1; also, Kekoo Gandhy, personal communication, July 2000. In this paper, I concentrate upon Nadkarni's book not only because it was at the centre of the Husain 'affair' but also because unlike the earlier writings of Bartholomew and Kapur and Geeta Kapur and like most accounts of Husain after the mid-1970s, it concentrates more upon biography and artistic persona than formal analysis or description. See Richard Bartholomew and Shiv S. Kapur, *Maqbool Fida Husain*, Harry Abrams, New York, 1972 and Geeta Kapur, *Husain*, Vakil, Bombay, 1969.

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2. Thank you to Geeta Kapur for prompting me to refine this position.
3. In October 1996, an image of Saraswati drawn by M. F. Husain was published, along with an article entitled 'Yeh chitrakar hai ya kasai? (Is this an artist or a butcher?)' by Dr. Om Nagpal in *Vichar Mimamsa*, a small Bhopal Hindi-language weekly. Some days later, members of the Bajrang Dal, a militant arm of the complex of Hindu right-wing political parties, broke into a gallery of Husain's work in Ahmedabad and ripped apart and burned a large number of his paintings and tapestries. In addition, charges were brought against Husain in the state of Maharashtra of offending religious sentiment with the drawing. A war of words broke out between the left artistic community and the political right wing, with the left claiming the right to free speech and artistic freedom and the right decrying Husain for the 'disrespect' of his 'modern art style'. Since 1996, Husain has been periodically a victim of VHP-led protests against his work, bans from entering the city of Ahmedabad, and other forms of harassment and intimidation.
4. Nicholas B. Dirks, 'The Home and the Nation: Consuming Culture and Politics in *Roja*', *Pleasuring the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, ed. by Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 161-85. Quote from Christopher Pinney, 'Introduction: Public, Popular, and Other Cultures', in same volume, p. 25.
5. The Emergency, during which Husain flatteringly portrayed Indira Gandhi, is generally seen to mark a change in Husain's position in the art world, after which writing about him moved from serious art criticism to something closer to hagiography. For a contemporary account of that change, see Eunice de Souza, 'What Does Husain Want to Say?' *Economic Times*, 13 May 1973.
6. My comments on Picasso are drawn from John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, Vintage International, New York, (1965, 1989).
7. Accounts of Husain's associations with a number of women play a significant role in Nadkarni's text. See pp. 75, 117-18, and 163.
8. The film, *Gaja Gāminī*, was the culmination of Husain's engagement with the film star Madhuri Dixit. The publicity surrounding the film and the accompanying paintings and sketches of Dixit, in which Husain and Dixit made several public appearances, filled the press in late 1995 and early 1996.
9. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Clothing the Goddess: The Modern Context after Representations of Devi', *Devi: The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art*, ed. by Vidya Dehejia, Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1999.
10. Monica Juneja, 'Reclaiming the Public Sphere: Husain's Portrayals of Saraswati and Draupadi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32: 4 (25 January 1997), pp. 155-57.
11. Jet Airways, *Jet Mall* catalog, January-February 2002.
12. Thanks to Anshuman Das Gupta for suggesting this film.
13. Anshuman Das Gupta and Shivaji K. Panikkar, 'The Transitional Modern: Figuring the Post-Modern in India', *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 41 (1995), p. 20.
14. Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, pp. 307-30.
15. Derrida, p. 328.
16. Lyla Bavadam *et al.*, 'In Defence of Freedom in Art: Against the Hindutva Attack on M. F. Husain', *Frontline* (15 November 1996), 4-9. Also see interviews with Akbar Padamsee and F.N. Souza in Shanta Gokhale, 'Drawing the Line: Censorship and the Arts', *Art India*, 1:4 (December 1996), pp. 22-27.
17. Juneja, p. 156.
18. From Vasudevan's comments elaborating on his 'Cinema and Citizenship in the 'Third World' a talk

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delivered at Northwestern University, 4 May 1998. Comments heard at Cultural Studies Conference organized by the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta in Santiniketan, January 2002.

19. In this, he was the inheritor of a long tradition of avant-garde cultural nationalist Bengali intellectualism of which Rabindranath Tagore is the ultimate example.
20. For a statement of this just at the point of its dissolution, see Ashis Nandy, 'Mass Culture, Crafts, and the Politics of Everyday Life', *The India Magazine*, 7 (September 1987), pp. 78-81.
21. Nadkarni, pp. 7-11, 17-18. Cf. Nadkarni, p. 72.
22. Nadkarni, p. 53.
23. Nadkarni, pp. 9-11, 25-31.
24. Partha Chatterjee, 'Two Poets and a Death', MSS version.
25. Ashis Nandy discusses the pedagogical role of these two figures, along with Ravi Shankar, as falling within the category of the 'classical', which, while arguable for Ray and Shankar, misses the distinction between the 'classical' and the 'modern' that governs the production and persona of Husain within the field of modern art.
26. Cf. Satish Deshpande's statement on the 'placeless', Nehruvian elite, which 'by adopting [a modernist] idiom . . . was able to render invisible its own ascriptive markers . . . that it came from a very select cultural background and a specific set of regions could become "transparent" — and thus be made to vanish'. In 'Hegemonic Spatial Strategies: The Nation-Space and Hindu Communalism in Twentieth-Century India', *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence*, ed. by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2000, p. 186.
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31. Ruchi Sawhney, 'And Now 'Furniture by M. F. Husain', *Inside/Outside*, 140 (November 1996), p. 22.

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# 22

# Subalternism in the Studies of Indian Art: An Argument Concerning Dushadh 'Madhubani' Paintings

*Meena Singh*

Since last three decades in Indian social sciences study, Subaltern theme is a major desideratum, particularly in historiography. There have been a number of studies of societies, histories and cultures "from below" which have dispersed terms, methods and bits of theory used in Subaltern Studies among countless academic sites.

Methodology for the study of Indian folk art can incorporate Subaltern Studies to help account for the very specificity of folk art, as studying it as one single unit is flawed, as is viewing all villages as homogeneous. Socio-political realities guiding one tribal village or any village are as different as the ideologies of various groups within it. Thus, term "folk art" is multi-layered and needs to be examined accordingly. Subaltern Studies help delve into this oversight of historiography of folk art.

## Subaltern Studies

My area of study is 'Madhubani' or 'Mithila' art — "folk" art practised in Bihar. In this article, I submit my argument for including Subalternism in the study of Indian art. Writing about the need for Subalternism in historiography, Ranajit Guha, a pioneer in Subalternism in Indian historiography, has said, "The historiography of Indian Nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitismcolonial elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism."[1]

Further elaborating, he writes,

> What is clearly left out of this unhistorical [elitist] historiography is the politics of the people. For parallel to the domain of elite politics, there existed throughout the colonial period, another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant group of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the Subaltern classes and groups consisting the mass of the labouring population and intermediate strata in town and country, that is, the people. This was not an autonomous domain, for neither it originated from the elite nor did its existence depend on the latter.[2]

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What is true of historiography is equally true of study of Art History. For too long we have been studying the art of the dominant groups.

Subaltern Studies concerns itself with the visible and occluded, i.e., related to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity, as well as the occluded attitudes, ideologies and belief systems — in short the culture informing the condition. Leela Gandhi opines that Subalternism aims

> first to foreground the exclusions and the elisions, which confirm the privileges and authority of canonical knowledge system, and second to recover those marginalized knowledge, which have been occluded and silenced.[3]

Dushadh art is one such occluded, if not silenced subject.

Thus, Subaltern Studies defined itself as an attempt to allow the "people" to finally speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and in doing so, speak for the muted voices of the truly oppressed. "Elite" is not taken in a narrow sense but is used to signify "dominant" groups. The Subaltern historians argue that the lesser rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper middle-class peasants who "naturally" ranked among the "Subaltern", could under certain circumstances act for the "elite" and therefore be classified as such in some local or regional situations. This is apparent in the case of "Mithila Art" which has been studied as "folk art" or "low art" in the national context of "high art", but is in fact the "elite art" of "Mithila" practised by Brahmin and Kayasth artists, whereas the "Dushadh" and other lower castes art practices constitute the 'Subaltern' Art.

The writing of scholars on "Mithila" Art has, over the years, concentrated on the paintings done by Brahmins and Kayasths, in what is presently known as "Madhubani" district. This paper is related to the study of contemporary Dushadh artist in Madhubani district of Bihar. It also includes the art of *Chamars, Mali, Nata*, etc., who share a common tradition with the Dushadhs. I seek to foreground the issue of subalternism and invigorate a debate on Art Historical studies viable to Indian folk and tribal art.

**Status of Dushadhs in Madhubani District**

The Dushadhs are peasant[4] class of people who have been accorded the status of Scheduled Caste[5] by the Government of India. The Dushadh comes seventeenth in the total of the twenty three castes in Madhubani.[6] In Mithila the hegemony of the upper caste is so vigorous that it came to be identified with the upper (*baraka*) layer in the society. (Mithila became synonymous with upper caste.) Hetukar Jha, a sociologist, writing on rural Bihar, opines that the *baraka* people are guided by the ethos of coercion and exploitation in their relationship with the lower class.[7] This background contextualises the issue of "Dushadh Paintings" being Subaltern art. While on field study, at Madhubani, I came across many instances where the artists of the lower castes felt marginalized by the "elite" artists of upper castes. Upper caste artists were felicitated by the government and thereby received a better

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response in the art market.

**Paintings by Upper Caste Brahmins & Kayasths**

In the earlier writings on Mithila art, details of art practised by Brahmins and Kayasth women artists of Madhubani were recorded, while there was a cursory mention of Dushadh art. W.G. Archer, in one of the earliest articles on Mithila art, writes ". . . The scheduled and backward people express their artistic instinct in certain utility articles (also on walls) as relief and ceremonial purpose."[8] W.G. Archer, Mildred Archer, Pupul Jaykar, Upendra Thakore and recently Jyotindra Jain are a few art historians who have shown scholarly interest in Mithila art. Rarely, an attempt has been made to study Dushadh art in detail, either its iconography or its contextualization via the problematic of caste and class.

The Brahmins and Kayasths comprising the upper caste in Madhubani area have been the lettered class. Their life has been organized around codified rituals. The iconography of their paintings too as been based on these rituals and handed down through generations. The surface used for paintings, by the Dushadh artists as well as the Brahmin and Kayasths is hand-made paper. It is supplied to the artists through various Government Handicraft Board outlets. Government started this practice during the famine of 1967-68 in Bihar. The Brahmin and Kayasth women use the white sheet as it is. They use their years of experience of painting on whitewashed walls. They transfer the ritual paintings on paper. Paintings by Brahmins and Kayasths are primarily based on *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. (*Pls.* 85 & 86)

Four categories of Mithila paintings by these artists are:

1. Line drawing on the ground or *aripan* done on the occasion of *pujas* and *vratas* and *saṁskāras*.
2. Wall paintings on *gosāīn ghara* and *kohbar ghara* with fertility symbols.
3. Themes on paper illustrating scenes from mythology of Rāma (*Pl.* 86), Kṛṣṇa (*Pl.* 85), Durgā, Viṣṇu, etc.
4. Paintings on cloth.

There is a historical explanation for the survival of this tradition of floor and wall paintings. From AD 1097 to 1580, Mithila had a continuous spell of Hindu rulers of Karnāṭa and later on of Oinwārā dynasty. Rulers introduced a series of social and religious reforms. Rules were framed for the guidance of the Hindus in their social and religious observances. They made elaborate arrangements for the observance of these *saṁskāras* and other ceremonies in Mithila homes exactly on the same pattern as they were followed in the royal palace. Kulinism, through Paṇajī system was followed amongst the Brahmins and Kayasths.[9]

The Paṇajī system was introduced in the thirteenth century by the ruler Garasiṁhadeva. It was a unique hierarchical system among the Brahmins and Kayasths. They were divided into several

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sections and it was insisted that they maintain genealogical tables and observed rituals and festivals. This has been referred to as Kulinism. This system was rigidly observed and with time became more elaborate resulting in the preservation of rites and also depictions of images of gods and goddesses. Thus, paintings done by Brahmins and Kayasths have an institutional basis. It was a state directed endeavour with rules laid down for iconography, which continue to be followed till date by the upper caste artists.

**Paintings by Dushadhs and Other Lower Castes**

In order to study Dushadh art, it becomes imperative to perceive and interpret it within its community context, its specific beliefs, conceptions and attitudes. The Dushadh paintings recount oral myths and traditions, a spiritual heritage, which has been handed down to them by their ancestors. They have preserved this oral tradition, the stories, and the actual experience of their lives, in a more tangible form with its appearances, colour and drama intact.

Dushadh paintings reflect difference between the handling of the very same paper. The paper is given a coat of cowdung (*gobar*).[10] This unique feature may have been derived from years of experience with making mud reliefs. In Dushadh paintings, the outline of figure and boundary are drawn with double lines and black dots fill the space between the two lines unlike the slanting lines used by the Brahmins and the Kayasths.

In Dushadh paintings, images and motifs get configured in space in a variety of ways. Neither the notion of distance, size nor the relative properties of the object images determines the relative size of motifs on the picture. There is a sense of freedom and lightness about the paintings, which seems lacking in upper caste Mithila paintings.

Dushadh paintings can be divided into three broad categories:

(1) Paintings based on legends of mythical hero Raja Salhesha (*Pl.* 87).

(2) *Godana* or tattoo paintings (*Pl.* 88).

(3) Paintings reflecting the social life of Dushadhs and landscapes of Madhubani district (*Pl.* 89).

Paintings based on legends of mythical hero Raja Salhesha, who is worshipped as God by Dushadhs are visual records of the oral tradition of their caste. Oral tradition of Raja Salhesha recounts the exploits of the hero Salheśa. He is the "King of the mountain" who was born of a beggar mother. While she was taking bath, a lotus flower came dancing from the sky and dropped three drops of water on her, and she conceived her three sons — Salhesha, Motiram and Budheshwar. In paintings by Dushadhs, a popular depiction is of the three brothers on their respective mounts — Salhesha on an elephant and the other two on horses Kusuma and Dona as well as the two consorts of Salhesha, are often painted. The constant struggle of these three brothers with various kings, gods and goddesses

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of upper castes such as Durgā form the major part of the saga. Fights with Durgā reflect the ongoing historical struggle between the dominant castes and the Subaltern castes. It is in the space of art, poetry and the mythologies that the subaltern caste expresses its aspirations and attains its dreams. Paintings are an important medium through which various layers of interrelationship between the upper strata and the subaltern strata can be recovered.

It is interesting to note the popularity of tattooing amongst the lower caste has been primary reason for adoption of its form and style by Dushadh artists. The thin line drawn by the needle, as a popular mode of body adornment have been skillfully incorporated in the *godana* paintings. The *godana* paintings of Dushadhs show delightful and inventive ways of handling conventional tattoo design, rendered with shifts in composition, depicting mythological beings.

It is in the paintings reflecting the social life that the close relationship between artist and their environment can be discerned. Paintings range from depiction of dying animals to bucolic sensibilities. An example is depiction of body of dead animal, blood scattered all over the place, the vultures and crows feasting on the bloated body and the figure of a man probably a *Chamar* — a Scheduled Caste person who disposes of dead animals and uses the hide for making leather goods.

The paintings, done by Dushadh artists are full of wit and boldness of spirit. In their unlettered limitation they have created an emphatic decorative ensemble full of life and beauty. The Dushadh artists draw upon their oral mythology and surrounding, which they translate on paper. Their choice of theme is not to suit the demands of the established creed. They have understood their own oral tradition and responded accordingly. It is in their paintings that their subjective interiority is reflected, their fondest dreams and aspiration expressed without shame, self-consciousness and self-censorship.

The significance of the study of Dushadh Art lies in the ushering of Subaltern sensibility in art in Indian context where caste and class do play an important role. The studies conducted in the sphere of Madhubani art have hitherto occluded Dushadh Art. On empirical grounds there is nothing to justify a pretension of monistic folk art in Madhubani practised by all castes alike. As more studies are conducted in Art History related to "folk" and "tribal art", more such presumptions will be laid bare and the "subjectivity" of such artists — their own "codes" specific to their tradition, can be studied from a different perspective. Pan-Indian traditions and beliefs reflect their regional counterparts, when one tends to examine cultural traits in the pan-Indian context; it is problematic because it tends to lead to oversimplification and generalisation about complex concepts and ideas.[11]

Since India is witnessing pluralisation of cultural identities and plural forms of references, it calls for reference to history, human consciousness and, ultimately, plural subjectivities.[12] The Subaltern Studies agenda helps to illuminate rather than hide the non-unitary character of folk art. It helps challenge the monistic view and draws attention to the other domain treated in dominant discourse as of no importance or even as altogether non-existent. Deeper research in various tribal and folk art

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will unfold many such complexities in the understanding of which art historical methodologies available to us will not suffice. Consideration of the class and caste identity in the study of folk art would not only fracture its monolithic understanding but also reveal a complex interplay between culture politics and visual representation.

## Notes and References


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# 23

# Identity, Discourse and Hybridity: An Analysis of MTV Imagery

*Vellachi Ramanathan*

> It is the numbing of the human sensorium, which makes certain styles of early public culture so compatible with the conventional art-historical exegesis. Hence Ravi Verma and Guru Dutt can be written about aesthetically in a way that Yogendra Rastogi and Manmohan Desai cannot. It is the sensory immediacy of more recent film and popular picture production which makes it so intractable to conventional analysis and regard.
>
> — Chris Pinney, 2001

> For you to be cool these days, you need four levels of coolness. First of all you need knowledge. Secondly, you need the attitude which you have always needed. Thirdly you need behaviour and fourth, you need visual.
>
> — at the MTV convention, *'Whats thanda, whats cool'*, 2001

My choice to study the MTV imagery is in part due to its non-serious content, a strategy purposefully adopted by it and in part, because MTV is more immediately a part of my "visual culture." Addressing media like the MTV, a relatively new phenomenon in India, falls into the broader discourse of visual culture. This paper elaborates on how a multinational channel like the MTV goes about building an "Indian" identity. It lays emphasis on the hegemonic means of the media adopting a critical stance to their image building process. Through an analysis of their tele-visual and print advertisements and the kind of cultural anchors they adopt, the question as to how such a media caters to an urban audience will be addressed. It will also focus on the hybrid set of metaphors that circulates on the MTV where a whole new vocabulary of visuality gets constituted via its inter-textuality

Within the question of visuality, one moves towards addressing visuality as a phenomenon that is highly consumer oriented. Themes imbibed with certain visual metaphors and terminology become central — "fear of seduction," "sheer pleasure" and the "anaesthetics." Other themes that come into focus are "the society of the spectacle," "the politics of representation," "fetishism" and "voyeurism". Relevant while studying a multinational like the MTV is the role of consumer culture and the public/ popular as a part of a wholly urban phenomenon.

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It is in this context that I examine the MTV, as reading a culture through "living inside the signs", not merely celebrating these cultural products or loosing oneself amidst these cultural objects but rather trying to take a position which bridges an "inside/outside" that Antonio Gramsci gives voice to.[1] It is an "affective/corporeal" encounter and a "cognitive" one, that illuminates why it is that field of popular/public cultural production that has so often been problematic from the view of an aesthetic discourse.

**The MTV Imagery as a Part of Public/Popular Culture**

Mass mediated imagery such as the MTV visuals are placed into the context of popular culture. Culture Studies in the west has often sought to conceive television as product of popular culture, championing the voice of the voiceless. As in the case of John Fiske's definition where he describes culture as "made by various formulations of subordinated or disempowered people out of the resources, both discursive and material, that are provided by the social system that disempowers them".[2] By this description, music television in America gave rise to hip hop in the 1970s and the raw music and style of British punk in the same era, emerging from cultural forms and practices, that were thought to be made by the lived experiences of working class people and racial or other minority groups.

However, MTV operates in India, right from its inception on levels which cater to a more cosmopolitan urban audience and does not in anyway conform with the aspirations and practices of economically marginalised groups. Hence "popular culture" may not strictly define the MTV in India, the usage of the term "public culture"[3] allows for a larger space of contestation. This is true of an Indian context where audiences for various cultural media tend to overlap. As in the case of the MTV India, it appropriates other mass media like film imagery, for instance, that the different strata in Indian society are exposed to and processes it in a way that is identifiable largely by young cosmopolitan audiences.

As the basis for the MTV India's campaign to cater to their audiences, they devised the concept of *deshicool*, seeking to create a cultural marker amongst their audiences, to define a national identity in its own terms. It is essential for my study, to understand the indigenized approach adopted consciously by the channel, which previously aired visuals that the audience could not relate to. What existed were purely conceptual advertisements, where references were culture-specific and were addressed to their respective western cultures. This did not have a wide reception amongst Indian audiences, making it necessary for MTV to survive competitors, to customize and to cater towards an indigenous audience.

The concept of *deshicool* was elaborated through the construction of Indian stereotypes like the *chaiwala, malishwala*. These characters are from "real life encounters,"[4] strategically sought to celebrate life through simple pleasures of music and movies. They address a diverse section and are intended to draw recognition amongst Indian audiences. "Image spots" or identity advertisements, as the

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*chaiwala*, play in the background, the old time hit song *yeh jawani* which brings out the sentiments of youth and meant to attract the inner feelings of its Indian audiences. The entire advertisement is filmed in orange sepia tone giving it an exotic touch. The narrative expands to cover working class people, from the woman selling corncobs, taxi drivers, vegetable vendors, dockyard workers, etc., and this portrayal of a diversity in Indian life could be seen in contrast to other multi-national programmes whose aims have an anthropological intent of showing India as a foreign locale. Here, the MTV strategically builds its image as less elitist.

The last frame in the advertisement transposes the MTV punch line "enjoy" into an expansive blue sea, amidst a horizon; this is seen in stark distinction to the previous frame which shows the *chaiwala*, the character that the MTV believes its audiences encounter in "everyday life". Nostalgia here is evoked through adopting older conventions of narrative cinema and subjects such as the *chaiwala, malishwala* though the MTV claims that they are a part of everyday life. They are strategically characterised as apolitical, appearing to be more "mythological" in the sense that they are portrayed in a time and space that is encapsulated and preserved. It is a conjecture and perhaps a piece of constructed life which the urban audiences can feel nostalgic about.

**Capitalizing on the New Generation**

As a formula the MTV uses the WQ (Wacky Quotient), where they take "seriously the business of fun." An instance of parodying stereotypes would be the character of the liftman. The entire advertisement of the liftman is shot in black and white. It shows an old liftman, who is supposedly a representative of the older generation, not identifying with the values of the MTV generation — "it's not made in India but mad in India," he cries.[5]

This punning in English refers to a more a localised identity collapsing linguistic form and content through its transformation of the English phrases. English being the medium of a global mass culture gets transmuted into an idiosyncratic babble. A perfect example of vernacular cosmopolitanism, adopted by the MTV and other music channels, comprising of much of the same style of English spoken by its younger audiences. Employing black and white film further emphasizes this gap between the older and the younger generation. The liftman is shown exasperated with the younger generation, especially with Cyrus Broacha, who is projected as a youth icon and whose image building process is analogous with the MTV.

A recent MTV survey of the younger generation brings out the attitude of their targeted audience to the older generation and ends on a triumphant note of self independence —

> young Indians today are far more independent and individualistic then they ever were. Both financially and otherwise . . . they think its okay to put their parents in old age homes. This is true even in the most conservative lot.

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The survey champions the unabashed self-independence that suggests a change in attitude, of maturity amongst their audiences. Ajanta Sircar in an article titled "Love in the Age of Liberalization"[6] on addressing the issue of youth surveys, suggests that an emerging individualism is conflated with liberalisation to mark a progress over a "previous model of development." Popular media as the MTV could be read as strategically employing a figure type of the older generation as the liftman, in order to triumphantly transfer it to a language of a free economy and thereby connect to their audiences.

**Imaging and Imagining Women**

On the MTV, the "display" of women both as video jockeys and in their advertisements, work within a commercial advantage of a structuration of pleasure. With regard to their video jockeys, each of them is modelled differently to cater to the "something for everyone project." A strategy is used in popular media, where each of them is an embodiment of a character which is identifiable to a wider teenage audience.

In MTV, Malaika, a video jockey in "Loveline," is seen as a liberated new woman who is comfortable at being looked at and aware that she is being commodified and doubles up also as a role model for her viewers. Briefly describing the MTV "Loveline" advertisement, I'd like to further elaborate on the expression of her "femininity." Malaika is shown as two-dimensional cutout, resembling a newspaper cutout of a woman, bringing out the materiality of her image.

Laura Mulvey with regard to flattened out representation of woman in media/film says that it is strategically done to devise no real time. Close-ups of Malaika's legs or face is shown and this too brings out the quality of a cutout or icon rather than a verisimilitude to the screen. She is shown masquerading in a variety of roles as winking at an old stuffed English man, as a karate expert, in the background are the lines — "Solves the case of a reluctant model." This then expresses the role of a liberated woman through a series of performances which could be read as gaining power and resistance and affirming an identity to its female audiences. She is also shown inside a television box and this is a formula strategically employed by most films where, in order to appease the male viewers sense of propriety, is construed the fiction of a performance within a performance seen on television within a television box. This trick placates the spectator's voyeurism because of the presence of performances that demands to be looked at. The woman as spectacle is tolerated not because it is not contentious but because the MTV takes great pains to devise ways to accommodate the moral concerns of its audience and coax their content. Malaika seen as a role model to her female viewers, juxtaposed with the image of a cosmopolitan women, a femme fatale appeasing her male viewers, at best illustrates a familiar usage of popular media, where a form of individualism is co-opted into capitalism.

Conventions of advertisement where beauty products are marketed with make-believe formulas (*Pl.* 90) for instant improvement of skin are ridiculed upon by more elite media like the MTV who

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caters more to an exclusive bracket of consumers. The representation of the relative freedom of women in terms of absence of conflict as in commercial advertisement is further emphasized and ridiculed.

**Parody on the MTV**

Hindi films are favourite objects of parody on the MTV. It capitalises on films shown with vignettes like *Filmi Funda, Bar Bar Dekho*, etc., where the original nature of the film is transformed to something totally different. Intertextuality here plays a large part as, for example, in the popular film *Deewar* thought of by film critics as a split-hero-subject which pits the community against the state. The climax scene of the movie — where the mother hands over the gun to one son to Bill her other outlawed son, Vijay, and then proceeds to the temple to await the arrival of that outlawed son (Amitabh Bachchan). Fatally wounded by Ravi (Shashi Kapoor), Vijay arrives at the temple and dies in his mother's arms. This scene through the MTV's bilingual idiosyncrasies and intertextuality is parodied to advertise for their programme on classical hits songs called *bar bar dekho* (*Pl.* 91). Firstly, the usage of a comic strip evokes through its fragmentation, the idea of using existing form of cinema, especially how every successive frame conceals the protagonist's face. Shown in focus is Amitabh Bachchan referred to as "Jimmy," which is not his name in the original movie, and whose usage here is to replicate the usage of a universal name in Hindi cinema wherein values of a certain class or a particular strata of audience are parodied. Moreover, the mother shown wearing a white *sārī* connotes the obsessive Oedipus sentimentality and satirises conventions employed by Hindi cinema.

Other programmes such as the *Filmi Funda* also subvert Hindi cinema conventions and politics. Laloo Prasad is converted into *cāloo* and Murli Manohar Joshi into *Urli* Manohar Joshi. *Indi pop* stars are celebrated and masqueraded in garbs of famous Indian politicians (*Pls.* 92 & 93).

Can this kind of parody merely be termed as buffoonery or can it be used as a critical tool ? However, unlike the derogatory usage of kitsch, the MTV is seen, in the words of its creative director, as "paying tribute" to it. Hence a subversive intent need not be read into the MTV's appropriation of cinema, but more a "stylistic of connivance" as Membe has termed it. According to him, there are myriad ways in which people "bridle, tick and toy with power." Membe's thesis suggests that the shared semiotics and gestures of a system "inscribe the dominant and the dominated"[7] within the same epistemological field. And through the usage of Hindi cinema's parody of dress, gesture and language, it permits a move through different social positions; a strategic move where MTV could cater to a wider public sphere.

Sumita Chakravarty on impersonation, writes that

> Impersonation subsumes a process of externalization, the play off/on surfaces, the disavowal of fixed notions of identity. But it also encompasses the contrary moments

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> of accretion, the piling up of identities, the transgression of social codes and boundaries.[8]

Although on one level, the MTV uses parody as a form of nostalgia, which plainly amounts to a recycling of styles as in the case of cinema but it has also proven to be subtly transgressive. Borrowing from previous traditions of parody in Hindi cinema, where ludic parody often presupposes a common epistemological space of "the ruler and the ruled," the MTV's subtle parody on politicians can be seen as such.

**Social Messages on the MTV India**

With regard to social messages on the MTV India, they have been relayed quite belatedly. As for instance, the two issues, the one on the Kashmir issue and the other on AIDS are recent telecasts in the year 2002. However, the MTV does have a history of playing music that is in keeping with the mood of the situation, like during the Gulf War, songs on anti-war sentiments were aired. However, this is not consciously adopted by MTV India as it will be beyond its purview to address social issues directly.

The "Made in India" advertisement which just about touches upon the issue of population, cannot be considered that of a social issue. As an advertisement used for a programme of Indipop, it had shown babies seen in popular calendar prints robed in saffron, moving on a conveyor belt while employing a popular rock video of "Pink Floyd: Another Brick in The Wall." The stylistic convention of showing children being stamped and manufactured mechanically bears a strong anti-institutional tone. The MTV videos such as these are analyzed by Ann. E. Kaplan as "anti-parental, anti-authority videos, revealing adolescent disillusionment with and distaste for, parental, work related or state authority." This allusion by the MTV might prove to be ironic but who will understand this, the state officials or the Indian audiences? Whom are these visual references to western popular music mythology addressed to? A point to note is that most often MTV advertisements, though invested with subversive intent, run the risk of losing their criticality.

**Self-Parody**

> A particular favourable occasion for tendentious jokes is presented when the intended rebellious criticism is directed against the subject himself or, to put it more cautiously, against someone in whom the subject has a share of collective person, that is (the subject's own nation for instance). The occurrence of self-criticism as a determinant may explain how it is that a number of the most jokes have grown up on the soil . . . of people making fun to such a degree of its own character.
>
> — Sigmund Freud, 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious'

What does it take to be Indian, perhaps what the MTV calls Indian, can be expressed anecdotally

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through Cyrus Broacha (*Pl.* 94).

> My passport. I'm Indian because I haven't been able to get a visa. I'm a patriot when there's a war, otherwise I'm too lazy to be anything. During cricket, I'm a patriot especially if the west Indians are playing, especially if they are of Indian descent like Chanderpaul and Dhanraj — this confuses me very much. The great thing about being Indian is that wherever you go people look at you in a strange way and then move away saying, oh, they are Indian. There must be lots of nice qualities about being Indian. I don't know them, but I'm sure we do.[9]

This unselfconscious image portrayed by the MTV generation acts as a paradox. The notion of such an image exists as a justification of one's image, to give it depth and substance and history; but the whole point of portraying such an image is the denial of any awareness of image. The act of justifying your image, forces one to admit that you have one and you are conscious of it, *qua* image. This proves to be problematic because, unselfconsciousness is a difficult state to maintain where everything is constantly represented back to the media and this, then, could be seen as a strategic move to generate publicity by making supposedly unusual statements.

**Hybridity as Employed through the MTV**

Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge in their book on public culture talk of the "transnational dissemination's of cultural modernity." They stress on globalization not being a similar development everywhere and that it should be addressed locally, face to face, however, admitting that such an interaction can be naive, laying stress on global tech-capital.

The MTV commits itself to a localized, indigenized audience and is aired solely in India. However, while laying emphasis on its global cultural form, it is necessary to lay emphasis on the global technologies of a multinational such as the MTV. Even if it tries to mediate a hybrid nature of "Indianness,"[10] its capitalistic intentions are overwhelming.

Digressing from visuals and focusing on the nature of hit songs that the channel airs in India, the majority of them are promoted by the channel and the music industry at large as commodities. The MTV changed its earlier west-oriented strategy to include 70 per cent Indian, in other words, Hindi songs comprising mostly of movie songs, Indipop and love ballads. Of noticeable interest is that there is a large stress on being Indian; it is at once celebrated and implicated. A constructed ideology such as this is promoted by music companies, which the channel chooses to tie up with. A number of instances can be illustrated such as the MTV association with TIPS, which presents the best Hindi film tracks called "MTV Houseful" or when its tie up with Virgin music records to present yet another Indipop album.

The MTV functions like a radio in airing/programming the music videos to garner audiences for its commercials for the record companies such as TIPS, Virgin records, etc., which produce the

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videos. The MTV serves as yet another means of promotion. The music videos themselves are not commodities or commercial entities but function as advertisements and entertainment. The MTV also ties up with film owners and profits are derived when they publicize these movie songs on air. Moreover, "star hunt" promotions are also organized by the channel as in the case of the film *Ishq, Vishq Pyaar Vyaar* (2001), where an entire star cast was chosen through a series of talent contests held through mega promotions across the five main cities.

Popular music critiques are of the belief that pop songs do not create their public, they discover it. Mostly, the public is seen as "passive, ready to absorb, whatever it is presented with." In thinking about the function that music producers perform, it is useful to allude to the concept of bardic television developed by John Fiske who has proposed that that the social function of television is akin to the bards. The medium of television stands between the ruling class, who rule and license them and the rest of society whose speech and events is processed by them into a specialised, rhetorical language which is then played back to them. This mediating role is active and implies that neither the ideology of the rulers/owners nor the experience of the viewers/consumers is merely reflected. Rather, theirs is a mediated reality, an artificial construct, arrived at by the investment of much ideological labour. This bardic construct is discernible in the contemporary industry of popular music and of a television network like the MTV, which is firmly enmeshed in the electronic media.

It is this sort of bardic function, where at once we are celebrated and implicated in the forms of music and in the content of television messages, produced by the music producers. Perhaps one can emphatically subscribe to the view that the industry is not simply responsive to the consumer's wants. Furthermore, one needs to be critical of the opposition which stresses the arbitrary imposition of meanings by the producers and sellers in which the public is seen as passive, ready to absorb whatever it is presented with — a vision which overlooks the active use to which people put pop music, the imaginary existence they lead through it which is not reducible to the official social hierarchies.

The dissemination of popular music resembles more the unidirectional nature of media flow via domestic channels or through international television such as the MTV. To that extent, even the consumer 'choice' provided by the MTV, reverses the unidirectional nature of such broadcasting. Earlier this unidirectional flow was further emphasised when the Asian MTV choose to transmit substantially the same, as in the west.

The icon of global music culture — Madonna — is consumed everywhere. The visual representation of Madonna is deployed on books and magazines to sell song books published by the government publishing house, where it is more of a pragmatic choice to make money and maintain the ideological line. In India, however, there is the "Hindi Madonna," Alisha. It is argued that it is easy for our political leaders to take to Indipop and film hits. "She may reflect the decadent west but at least Alisha Chinnai is indian and she sings in hinglish."[11] So when the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin

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Powell chose to give audience to the MTV viewers recently (February 2002), the Indian media/press started taking the MTV seriously. The government with advice from the Indian consulate in Washington decided now to use the MTV as a public relations coup. The same government not so long ago was against the multinational channel using the national flag as part of their logo. Here, it can be seen that the State is accepting and legitimizing a certain form of hybridity, that is produced by the MTV.

Capitalism and dominant interests as illustrated in the case of the MTV, has no economical need to distinguish between high and low culture, which is why probably they decide to indigenise full scale, distinguishing it from Channel V which is more oriented towards an urban audience in terms of coverage. When the MTV earlier employed in India the production techniques of quick editing and followed a "postmodern" flow of video, there lurked a doubt that the Indian audience may never know what is happening, if "pastiche" and the quick undercut of images do not line up to a coherent whole.

Instead what you have now aired on the MTV is the more narrative style — an apt example would be the Jagjit Singh music video of *Na Khoya Na Paya* where you have the prime minister fetishised as a commodity. Seen as a poet, intellectual, politician seeking salvation through some sort of an overhauled nationalism, myths provided in music through a national/utopian construct. The MTV even went so far as to include the prime minister as one of their youth icons in their *'whats cool, whats thanda'* youth survey (2001).

Hybridity must often bear the imprint of cultural dominance. It is, today, a fact of social reality for many parts of the world and the dominance and cultural imperialism inherent in it does not prevent the subversiveness and the progressiveness produced through it, Edward Said spoke of accepting "the reality of hybridity given that we are all mongrels". Homi Bhabha in "Signs Taken For Wonders" has thought through hybridity in a specific colonial context that of British colonialism, historically and geographically in an effort to describe the conditions of colonial discourse.

Bhabha wonders if the "acceptance of authority excludes any evaluation of the content of an utterance" and if the sources of authority discovers both conflicting reasons and personal judgement, then can the signs or marks of authority be anything more than empty presences of strategic devices? Need they be less effective because of that ? Bhabha concluded that the production of authority no longer seemingly commands authority.[12] It gives rise to a series of questions of authority. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence.

The MTV appropriates an "official" local culture into a process of mediation to display a hybridity. On one hand, it reassures that the American global culture is not all that bad. On the other, it asserts an Indian identity pitting it against the former, stubbornly resisting the power of an Euro-American one. But this remains merely superficial. The MTV in India with its rich "Indian" imagery appears to

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be skin-deep and mere effect — the management of hybridity appears to be mere opportune strategy or gimmick. Opposites and contradictions meet within the figurality of the hybrid but are easily resolved, through a recourse to an "Indianness."

The problem that I wish to address here, is one of "visuality." In a cultural aesthetic ethos driven by techno-capital and the MTV model of virtualising reality, hybridity has become the pure and the formal characteristic of the medium itself. In other words, hybridity in the age of visuality has become a fait accompli. Hybridity is so eminently stageable as spectacle and of pure formal surface effect that it resists and trivialises explanation. Thanks to technology, everything and every phenomenon is inevitably hybrid and therefore there is no need to be erudite and critical about hybridity. The MTV production techniques have made it possible to produce and package hybridity for consumption without having to produce a historical account of the phenomenon of hybridity. Indeed, what we have now is a mediatised hybridity made easy for all, consumable by all. Hybridity is now made safe and chic for the prurient gaze. What should be looked into, as Madhava Prasad writing on national culture and television stresses, is that it is no longer a question of cultural invasion but a struggle between compelling foreign and indigenous capital.

## Notes and References

1. Gramsci's concept of an affective/corporeal encounter cited in *Pleasure and the Nation*, ed. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 19-20.
2. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, M.A., 1989, pp. 1-5.
3. Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge with regard to South Asian studies on popular culture stress the need for a more fluid approach, doing away with western approaches thereby suggesting the term 'public culture', as a way of naming the space between domestic life and the project of the nation state where different social groups constitute their identities by their experiences of mass mediated forms in relation to the practices of everyday life.
4. In a personal interview with Cyrus Oshidhar (Vice-president, creative at MTV, he spoke of the characters in the image spots as being inspired from 'real life encounters', citing this as reason as to why characters such as the liftman are so readily identifiable by younger audiences. The 'liftman' was inspired by an old Gujarāti man, whose mannerisms Oshidhar found readily lending itself to parody.
5. The 'Wacky quotient' is part of the MTV strategy, where MTV cocktail equals to consumer interest +topicality+Wacky quotient. In 'Television in India; changes and challenges', Gopal Saksena writes on the emerging satellite channels and more recent advertisement's humour, as a strategy wherein rural area and towns' skepticism about urban/metropolitan life disappears with a few laughs especially with regard to the usage of 'hingiphilia'. On the MTV India, where everything is seen to get localised, their manifesto reads — 'MTV *Mantras,Yantras and other Jantar-Mantar*' (2001), further going on to describe their formula on making the channel wholly Indian. The Wacky Quotient forms part of their strategy to localise where Indian imagery is parodied upon.
6. Ajanta Sircar, "Love in the time of Liberalization *Kayamat Se Kayamat Tak*", *Journal of Arts and Ideas*", no. 32-33, 1999, pp. 35-59.
7. Achille Membe, "stylistic of connivance" cited in Dwyer and Pinney, *op. cit.* pp 15-17.

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8. Sumita Chakravarthy, "impersonation" cited in Dwyer and Pinney, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17.
9. Cited by Cyrus Broacha, as quoted in the Outlook magazine, issue dated 20 August 2001, on 'What's Indian'.
10. Mitra Anand, 'Television and popular culture in India, A study of the Mahabharata', has dealt with in detail about how Doordarshan reformulates culture; with a state run channel there are specific notions of Indian culture that articulate a national identity. However, the MTV as a mass medium also forges to define a 'Indianness', quite in opposition, though 'religion' and 'politics' do not play a role.
11. Refer to the article titled 'Pop goes the nation' by Vir Sanghvi (2002).
12. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994.

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# 24

# *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī*: Meaning and Excess in Contemporary Public Culture

*Madhuvanti Anantharajan*

> Bat Tola farces and Kalighat painting no doubt satirised babu culture, but they do not offer any immediate access to a distinct level of popular culture. Their patrons may include many bhadralok, while the strongly hierarchical values they embody would seem to suggest a culture imposed on, rather than coming from, the popular classes. —Sumit Sarkar

> Our present is the difference between the western theories (of which our theories of ourselves are but an extension) and our meta-theory of western theories (of which their theories of our part of the world are but a component). —Vivek Dhareshwar

Placing documented material within an academic category is sometimes a very useful thing. But at other times, it is necessary to recast the space that is to accommodate the material, until all the meaning one wishes to include finds a place and does not get trimmed away in the process of trying to squeeze the material into an ill-fitting category. As far as the *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī* festival is concerned, the urbanness of the festival as well as the "kitschiness" of the images makes it tempting to locate it within popular culture. However, as it is turns out, the space of popular culture does not suffice.

In attempting to study the festival of *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī*, I ended up feeling resistance on two counts. Firstly, the persistent, if not inevitable resistance of material that is outside one's immediate experience, in terms of the specific region-gender-class location of the festival, which is different from my own. Second, is the complexity of the material, which cannot, as I already stated, be fitted into the conventional understanding of "popular culture."

As for the first point, I state, at the outset, that my intention is not to try and negate my own location; but rather, to view it as the starting point of my observations and under-standing of the festival. In this context, I should also mention that my documentation is restricted to Pune and Baroda, as representative of two slightly different attitudes to the festival.

As for the second point, the field of visual culture and culture studies in India now recognizes

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the limitations of the term "popular culture" in an Indian context. Popular culture has been defined in relation to its other, the elite culture. Such a straightforward divide between the high and low cannot be seen in India. Popular culture also presupposes a uniform degree of industrialization, which again, is absent in India. The western understanding of popular culture would very clearly enumerate its components and place it within an equally clear social space. This seems an impractical proposition in India, as an example like the *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī* festival demonstrates. The images and rituals that constitute this festival exists in an industrialized urban space, but retain references to their rural, even tribal roots. The purpose of identifying this is not to establish the origin of these images. Rather, it is to argue for a methodology that can accommodate such fluid interaction between pre-industrial and industrialized cultures. In this respect, Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's conceptualisation of a "public culture" makes sense. By this, they mean that

> space between domestic life and the projects of the nation state — where different social groups . . . constitute their identities by their experience of mass mediated forms in relation to the practices of everyday life.[1]

They further stress,

> The term public culture is not a neutral or arbitrary substitute for all these existing alternatives. . . . Nevertheless it appears to be less embedded in such highly specific western dichotomies and debates as high versus low culture.
>
> With the term public culture, we wish to escape the by-now-conventional hierarchies and generate an approach, which is open to the cultural nuances of cosmopolitism and of the modern in India.[2]

In the introduction of the book *Pleasure and the Nation*, Christopher Pinney sees this opening up of space by the term "public culture" as useful, in that it enables the inclusion of seemingly elite media like "the popular novels of Shoba De or Zee TV."[3] I feel that, by the same token, "public culture" can be stretched in another direction as well, whereby it can include objects and process, which, even while being rooted in an urban location, slip time and again into rural or tribal expression. Just as it is now recognized that calendar prints form an important part of worship in villages, it is equally visible that urban phenomena like the *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī* festival have not left behind certain folk and tribal elements. Again, the intention behind pointing this out is to question the specificity of the spaces allotted to these elements, and the presumption of their rigidity. By "folk," I mean certain modes of expression and worship which lie outside codified Brahmanical faith and more often than not precede industrialisation. And by 'tribal,' I refer to practices existing within certain tribal communities in India. I do not use these as blanket terms — on the contrary, my intention is to establish that our understanding of these terms should be kept open and not limited by biased and predetermined criteria. I hope to further clarify this ahead in the paper.

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Lawrence Levine, in his essay "The Folklore of Industrialised Society: Popular and its Audiences"[4] advocates the notion that popular culture is, as the title suggests, an extended folklore of industrialized society. While his theory is grounded in a purely western scenario, his contention that we cannot see a sharp dichotomy between the pre-industrial and industrialized society, proves valid in India's case. Raymond Williams, in his *Keywords*,[5] also sees an inherent connection between "folk" and "popular". Thus, even within the space of public culture, there can be no overarching definitions for these terms, except those formulated within specific contexts and for a specific purpose. Keeping this in mind, the seemingly conflicting notions that images from within the festival appear easier to locate.

The association of Gaṇeśa with idea of a people's hero is not a new one. In his detailed study of Gaṇapati's evolution as a deity, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya traces a social history of India. This is a study rooted in Marxist ideology and aims at establishing a tribal order as the original Indian social order. Etymologically, the word Gaṇapati is broken down to mean "leader of the people." Chattopadhyaya gives an elaborate explanation of the various interpretations and stages in the incorporation of Gaṇeśa were originally a tribal god. He further strengthens the point by bringing out the totemic quality of the elephant head of Gaṇeśa. He also reads into the aspect of the *mūṣaka vāhana*, and suggests that it could represent a tribe vanquished by the elephant tribe.[6]

These associations of Gaṇeśa with the masses are bound to have remained in some part in the people's memory, for Bal Gangadhar Tilak to have chosen this deity as the locus of the public nationalist movement in Maharashtra. But even if we do not deal with Gaṇapati at the level of origins and only look at the way the festival is celebrated today, there are quite few aspects of it that allude to fetishism, ritual creation and destruction of images, which are not a part of upper caste Brahmanical faith. In Pune, the two main Gaṇapatis of the city, the Kasba Gaṇapati and the Tambdi Jogeśwarī Gaṇapati, are associated with shrines of the *grāmadevtā*s of Pune.

As a deity, he occupies a central place in the community, at least for the period of the festival. The local Mandals function on behalf of the residents of the area, and each identifies itself by its Gaṇapati. In this sense, the images embody the imagination and values of the entire community — quite like the observation that Kathryn Hansen makes about the various versions of the popular performance of the nineteenth century, called Inder Sabha, where she identifies a "visual icon that synthesised religious, erotic, and political modes of self-identification."[7]

This leads us to another point, whereby the image and all the activities of the Mandal are aimed at attracting the maximum crowd possible. And in this process, the image is visibly commodified and increases in scale and grandeur so as to increase consumption. The topicality of many of the tableaus can be seen as a strategy to feed rapidly changing interests of the viewing public. Yet, the same topicality can be seen from another point of view. The tableaus only depict what the audience is already familiar with. This is similar to folk narratives where what is said is not new or original

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but serves to revive the memory of some event, whereby the audience identifies itself *en masse* with the values of the tale.[8] This comes across, for example, in the tableaus depicting the Kargil war, or the film *Gadar*, where a sense of patriotism is reinforced (*Pl.* 99).

We should also consider that, visually, these images are definitely a part of the calendar art lineage. The statement and politics of the post-industrial phenomenon of calendar art emerges out of India's multi-faceted negotiation with modernity. The semiotic content of these images leads us to various social and political constructs. These include notions on national progress, gender relations and so on, which formulate the public imagination at various levels, and have been studied by academicians like Patricia Uberoi,[9] Kajri Jain[10] and others. More recently, these images are also the bearers of politico-religious ideologies like the drive for Hindutva (*Pls.* 95 & 96). In the *Gaṇeśa-Caturthī* images, this link with the ideals of the nation-state is self-evident when one considers the festival's origins in Tilak's nationalist ideology. Yet, looking beyond the images themselves, other layers of identity formation are discernible. One offshoot of the complex identities of modern India is the simultaneous urge to define and preserve what is "traditional" and the constant preoccupation with innovation and technology. For example, it is generally accepted among those actively involved in the festival, that Pune, to a large extent, retains its "traditionality," whereas Baroda leans heavily on novelty. Needless to say, the tradition that is preserved is a constructed one. On the one hand, is the address to a presumed Hindu Indian audience. Various deities are incorporated into the tableaus (*Pl.* 98) and the idea of a unifying Hinduness nullifies sectarian differences. On the other hand, is the "traditional" of nationalism, whose archetypes include Tilak and even Shivaji, who, as a local hero symbolizes similar values of resilience and love for the land, which are rooted in his Hinduness. Most tableaus in Pune and Baroda include pictures of these figures; whose presence invokes a sense of nationhood.

The "other" of this traditionality is the industrial modern, which seems to hold an allure that simultaneously fascinates and repulses. What I mean to say is that is great pride in the idea of technology as progress as is evident even in the small mechanical devices employed in the tableaus (*Pl.* 97). The "set" for one of the *Gadar* tableaus includes a moving train. Another tableau includes a water channel that is kept flowing by mechanical pump. At the same time, there is also the sense of decadence of values that is associated with modernization, and one can sense allusions to the idea of *kaliyuga*. Within this, various gender constructs are evident. As one *Mandal* chief explained, the presence of Lakṣmī at the feet of Viṣṇu-Gaṇeśa, was meant to restate values derived from the television soap opera *Kyonki Sas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, and was meant to depict the helplessness of a mother-in-law, pitted against manipulative daughters-in-law. This gendering is further evident in the public procession at the end of the festival, which is an entirely male affair.

Another construct comes through while comparing the mode of operation of the *Gaṇeśa* Mandals with Sara Dickey's[11] study of Tamil cinema fan clubs. In these clubs, Dickey observes the construction of social archetypes, in relation to the values and qualities that the heroes are invested with. However,

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while class inequalities are recognized. They do not "critique the existence of class itself." Dickey attributes this absence of critique to the impression among the club members of being at a step above the poor whose cause they champion. A similar attitude is apparent in *Gaṇeśa* Mandals, where the workers see it as their duty to educate the public through the tableaus and promote activities aimed at social welfare. An example of this is the Mangalbazaar Gaṇapati in Baroda, whose installation and organization of related activities is supervised by one of the residents, an ex-municipal corporator who wields considerable power in the area. He states that the person chosen to perform the *āratī* and the crowd regulation take the caste of the people into consideration. His position as a Vaiṣṇava obliges him, he says, to ensure that people of lower castes do not move too close to the image. Yet, there is the persistent notion of "doing-something-good-for-the-community." We must also recognize that, given the political power that many of the various Mandals' members hold, it would only work in their favour to preserve existing social hierarchies.

Having brought out these aspects of the festival, I would like to return to the original question of how so complicated a process can be studied. It seems clear now that the individual processes of the festival defy any convenient categorization as "sacred" or "profane", to use Mircea Eliade's[12] dichotomy. What is visible is a mingling of faith (to use Rustom Barucha[13] term), politics, commerce and many more aspects, which only to one fact — that these are only various dimensions from which the phenomenon of public religion in India can be studied. What is thus necessary is, an academic model that can accommodate these specific nuances without compromising their complexity. Instead of holding on to worn out polarization like those of Eliade's, it would be useful to re-cast those paradigms.

The question of religious fundamentalism has gained great momentum in contemporary India. Also persistent are the attempts to fashion a resisting discourse. I feel that, if fundamentalism is to be effectively resisted, the existing secularist discourse. I feel that, if fundamentalism is to be effectively resisted, the existing secularist models must be re-worked to allow a complex understanding of religion and its varied functions within the society. For art history, this implies, at the outset, a methodology that breaks out of an object/context mode. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, in their paper, "Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Contexts and Senders," point out the shortcoming of the positivism approach to history. This approach, they show, takes for granted the availability of the signs that constitute what we understand as context. Context is as much the researcher's construction as the object conceptualized, thereby indicating that context subjectively diminished or augmented by the individual historian according to his or her agenda or stance. Acknowledging this is imperative if we are to try and understand the workings of religion and politics and the emergent signs in Indian society.

Distinguishing between the various identities that exits within the larger realm of religion is one of the first exercises that can be undertaken. And such an approach would also pave the way towards understanding the many other areas of religion in our country that remain as yet unaddressed —

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this, I feel, would even allow us to move towards an enabling and productive discourse to resist fundamentalism.

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# 25

# Windowed Style of the Desktop Interface, Web Narrativity and Indian Theories of Meaning

*Nandini Gandhi*

The unfolding of cyberspace is the latest step of cultural/biological evolution and the basis for future evolution. Cyberspace integrates all previous media like writing, the alphabet, the printing press, telephone, cinema, radio, television, and furthermore all the improvements of communication, all the mechanisms ever designed to create and reproduce signs. Cyberspace allows not only a "one to one" and a "one to many" but also a "many to many" communication and a real time articulation between these modes.

The World Wide Web can be considered a unique global polyglot hyper document written and read by virtually everyone. This is the first time that any text can be considered as a part of an actual language sphere. The centre of this sphere is nowhere, its circumference everywhere, and each of its elements related to all others. This huge unique global document is a kind of dynamic reification of the global human cultural context. The main signification of cyberspace is the general interconnection of everything in real time, the realisation of the virtual space where the cultural and linguistic forms are living.[1]

This medium has only recently arisen from its military industrial roots and has transformed itself almost overnight into a mass phenomenon. Perhaps that is why the net is so pregnant with possibilities. With its global interactivity, collective tendencies, rapidly evolving technologies and free exchange of ideas all demanding constant change and renewal, the medium is revolutionary by nature.

## Theorising Net.art

Net.art[2] practice is barely a decade old, precisely a phenomenon of the mid-1990s. Practice and theory are in a flux. A cascade of conceptual dissimulations destabilize established paradigms and alter relational dynamics:

- Work of art to art event
- Reproduction to simulation
- Mimesis to virtuality

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- Image to interface
- System to rhizome
- Floating to flickering signification[3]
- Author-as-reader and reader-as-writer

While this break with many art historical assumptions — the problematic relationship of digital (new media) art with prior models of authenticity, authority and robust fixity generates a sense of anxiety, its liquescence, its epic endlessness. ". . . a work of art that is always in the process of becoming something else or becoming someone else's . . .",[4] offers new forms of articulation and art making and alternative modes of perception and interpretation.

Depending upon where you stand in relation to the development of net.art, any discussion of aesthetic qualities or narrative structures may seem either inconsequential or inadequate. Yet, the time to construct, rather to attempt to theorize poetics for net.art is now, since the ontological shifts of net.art, are still in progress and no dominant aesthetic model has emerged as yet.

**The Desktop Interface: Windows to a Mutating Discourse**

The windowed style of the personal computer, the user-friendly *graphical user interface* (GUI) changed the character of computing, marking its transition from a mere number cruncher and symbol manipulator to an expressive tool. What the GUI does, is to spatialise language, turn words into architecture. Windows mobilizes that architecture. Windows are more fluid, more portable. You can drag them across your screen, resize them with a single mouse click, make them bigger or smaller, push them off to the peripheries or bring them into focus. For cyber-philosophers like Sherry Turkle, the windowed imagination is emblematic of our larger "postmodern" condition: the unified field of traditional post-Enlightenment thinking fractured out into multiple points of view, each of them equally valid — a passage from the fixed system of the command line to more anarchic possibilities.[5] Steven Johnson in *Interface Culture* says the modern interface "makes imaginable" — the otherwise invisible cotillion of zeroes and ones whirling through our microchips.[6]

This inquiry starts at the level of a visual resonance in the spatial organization, narrative structures of the Indian pictorial tradition and the windowed style of the desktop interface. It is an attempt to examine web narrativity through transactions enacted at the "interface" between the narrator through the fluidly mutating interactive work of art, the spectator, and the materiality of the mediating technology. Mark America, mercurial author of *Grammatron*, editor of the web magazine *alt-x*, has expounded the possibilities of hyper fiction in his web-based article "Hyper Text Consciousness" (HTC).

> HTC as experienced in cyberspace is creating a new form of narrativity to get lost in. This narrativity may be more hallucinogenic or clickual to the reader/participant, but it still has the feel of a narratologically-mind discourse.[7]

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Eventually this user-driven, non-linear branching discourse will alter our sense of the authorial centre, which Randall Packer describes as a dissolution of self.

### The Dynamic of Non-linear Narratives

The tropes of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*,[8] are distinct in mode and manner. The former is representative of the European tradition for over 500 years, the latter schema continuous in the Indian tradition for near 2000 years. Immediacy, which springs from the Renaissance tradition of humanism and realism, is achieved through the illusion of a unified single point perspective, whereas hypermediacy is characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation and mediation. They can also be appreciated as being guided by the visual and epistemic logic respectively. These modes of presentation are characterized by Richard Lanham[9] with a variant nuance as the corresponding logic of *transparency* and *opacity* — of *looking through* and *Looking at* respectively. He equates immediacy as the attitude of the Philosophic tradition, whereas hypermediacy resonates with the Rhetoric tradition: "designed attention structures;" persuasive and strategic, as opposed to logical and objective. Lanham mapping resonances between chaos theory and rhetoric says,

> That rhetoric — considered as an information system that functions economically, that allocates emphasis and attention — resembles what is now called in many fields a non-linear system. That is, dynamic rather than static, a constantly changing emergence rather than a fixed entity; global rather than specialised into disciplines and constituent parts: a system that tries to describe the confusion of everyday experience rather than narrowing it into a delimited predictable field of study.[10]

Immediacy is used as a visual strategy to make the medium disappear, to work hard to erase all signs of intervention and foster in the viewer a sense of presence, an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium. Through the artifice of singular focus, this strategy is exemplified by Renaissance linear perspective, the clinical display of art in the gallery space, the unobtrusive, non-committal page layout in serious canonical texts that proclaims its "authenticity." In Design, the Swiss graphics of the Basel School exemplifies "this correct balance between form and function." Legibility and readability become dominant concerns. Frutiger's Universe type is the epitome of "the creative potential unleashed by the unity of proportion."[11] The desire for immediacy has a history not easily overcome. At least since Renaissance it has been the defining feature of western visual representation.[12]

Painting, photography, narrative cinema, live coverage on TV sought immediacy through the aesthetic value of transparency with techniques of *linear perspective, erasure and automaticity*, all of which are strategies also at work in digital technology (digital photorealism, virtual reality, immersive games). However, the web interface, which closely retains the architectonic structure of the windowed style of the desktop interface, does not completely erase the signs of its mediation. Unlike a perspective

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painting or a photo real computer graphic, the windowed surface of the desktop interface, does not attempt to unify the space around a single point of view. Instead each text window defines it owns logic, each graphic window its own dictate, each its own rhetoric.

Immediacy is an important technique/strategy for making the space of the picture continuous with the viewer's space. As Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin observe in *Remediation*,

> Photography was a mechanical-chemical process whose automatic character seemed to many to complete the earlier trend to conceal both the artist and the process. In fact photography was often regarded as going too far in the direction of concealing the artist by eliminating him altogether. Virtual Reality seems to complete that circle.[13]

In contrast, hypermediacy can be recognized as a representation. Da Vinci's *Monalisa* works its magic through immediacy, but Marcel Duchamps's moustached Monalisa and Andy Warhol's *Monababies* make their subversive statements through hypermediacy. Hypermediacy in the western tradition has been the spatial norm in medieval cathedrals illuminated manuscripts, and Dutch paintings and baroque cabinets. Conceptually, hypermediacy as a representational strategy is operative in forms such parody, mythology, fiction. Rene Margritte's and other surrealistic works, Dadaism, photomontage and collaging techniques, pop and conceptual art practice. Abstract art tries to bypass issues of representation altogether.

When a presentation acknowledges that it is a representation, the viewing dynamics, and the relationship between the art object and viewer changes, shifting from the *consumptive* to the *engagement* mode. What does this altered relationship imply with regard to the "reading" of the art object and the power dynamics of looking? Or, considered in the context of Indian theories of meaning, what role does the *svarūpa* (form) of the *nāda* (sound/utterance) play in propelling it to its ultimate *artha* (meaning)? Kathleen Fisher's semantic network module of meaningful learning, provides a productive intersection to look at how linking skills and building a robust web of interconnected ideas can support knowledge construction and reflection.[14] The ecosystem as a structural and functional unit of ecology maintained in dynamic stability through energy flows between co-acting organisms and the environment provides an organic model of a complex non-linear system of connectance. It is interesting to note that mature systems characterised by complexity and heterogeneity require lesser energy to maintain themselves.[15]

Not only is hypermediacy celebrated in Indian art and architecture, this visual-spatial sensibility is the underlying social imagining of our cultural sensibility. Our multi-headed gods, the thousand invocations to lord Viṣṇu, his *daśāvatāra*, our mandis, melas and election rallies. A similar non-linear style can be discerned in the dramatic structure of a Sanskrit play and the theory of modal Indian music. The structure of the Sanskrit play is cyclical — based on themes of separation and reunion — it ends as it begins, various devices are used such as the dream, the trance, the premonition, the flashback, to disrupt the linearity of time and make action recoil upon itself. [16] Perhaps it is a sensibility

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to describe things as they are felt, not as they are seen, to tease meaning, a celebration of an artistic reality, an expression of a psychical reality, a spiritual reality, not the visible reality. A yearning to reach "those hidden realms," what Rabindranath Tagore referred to as the "cave of the heart . . . where the song is heard."[17]

Hypermediacy is complex and manifested in widely varying genres through forms and strategies privileging contingent generation of meaning. Claude Levi Strauss has demonstrated with myths that "fragmentation and recombination" of myths in reversible and irreversible time sequences result in different versions of the same myth, leading to unsuspected and new kinds of interpretation.[18]

## Hypermediacy in the Digital Media

In digital media the logic of hypermediacy, the unabashed acknowledgement of the media of artistic intervention is most evident in the anarchic, heterogeneous "windowed style" of the World Wide Web page the desktop interface (*Pl.* 100). It is a visual style that in the words of William J. Mitchell (1994) "privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy and heterogeneity and emphasises process or performance rather than finished art object."[19] Norman Bryson refers to the viewer's experience of looking at a hypermediated fractured spaces as a *glance* and the fact that the aesthetic of the glance also makes the viewer aware of the process of creation and the process of viewing.[20] Bolter and Grusin have referred to "the logic of hypermediacy as expressing the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as a 'real' space that lies beyond the mediation."[21]

I acknowledge within this scheme that immediacy and hypermediacy are culture and context specific conventions and not absolute binaries without grey tones. They are considered "absolutes" here only as instrumental tropes.

## Hypermediacy and Reading Meaning

Vannevar Bush, (1945), one of the key architects in the development of digital technology has said,

> The human mind . . . operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain.[22]

According to Kathleen Fisher,

> Knowledge construction involves systematically building a robust web of interconnected ideas. Embedded in the web are hierarchical relations, temporal relations, causal chains, sensory cues and much else. The evolution of linking skills makes the transition from fuzzy, to precise or analytical thinking.[23]

According to B.J. Baars' Cognitive Theory of Consciousness, (Cambridge, 1988)

> whenever two ideas are brought together in the conscious memory, that information

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> is broadcast to all the subconscious processors, thereby making it available to them for solving of the problem they may be attempting to solve.[24]

Or stated differently, the process of linking new concepts at the surface "unites" conscious and unconscious knowledge, providing a synergistic momentum that explodes/blossoms/surfaces/reveals as insight.

Bhartṛhari's theory of *sphoṭavāda*[25] (blossoming of knowledge) provides insight for the reading of meaning from what seems like a concatenation made up of different sound units arranged in a particular order, or lexia link activated in a particular sequence. *Sphoṭa* is the indivisible symbol expressing meaning. The *sphoṭa* theory presupposes a comprehensive cognition of the letter/word/linguistic symbols in a particular order. Without the *sphoṭa* doctrine symbols would be left meaningless and incomplete for it is the *sphoṭa* that makes the implicit meaning explicit, gives life to symbols as it were. Harold Coward explains it from the point of view of the listener, as the "transcendent ground in which the spoken syllables and conveyed meaning find themselves united."[26] Others have called *sphoṭa* the "real word" or the "universal word" emphasizing, that reality resides in the marriage of the *śabda* (word) and *artha* (meaning).[27] Bhartṛhari splits the *nāda* (sound) and the *artha* (meaning), "to illuminate the nature of knowledge and provide different levels of meaning, but ideally provide a bridge across the gulf between objective and subjective, uniting understanding with realization."[28]

As R.C. Pandeya puts it, ". . . meaning being a relation, is neither the word nor the object, it depends upon them and is beyond them". [29]

Quoting Harsha Dehejia,

> Although *nāda* has epistemic function, and devoid of *artha*, yet its form has a vital function. It is only through the *nāda* that the immutable *sphoṭa* will eventually arise. It is a necessary intermediary in language, for 'one strives for Reality remaining on the path of unreality'. The *nāda* is merely a springboard and not a final destination. It is the *svarūpam* of the *nāda* that is the repository of an innate meaning and one that plays a pivotal role in propelling to its ultimate *artha*.[30]

This is perhaps one of the reasons for my inclination to believe that the windowed-interface is a significant form with ideological underpinnings.

As Dehejia summarises, in *The Advaita of Art*,

> In the first place with the doctrine of the *sphoṭa* the onus of the meaning of the sentence, shifts from the outer result or effect of the sentence, to the consciousness of the listener.[31]

This is in keeping with the significant status given to the *rasika* (the spectator) as equal to the artist in the Indian aesthetic tradition. M. Hiriyanna has remarked, "Appreciation of poetry is essentially the

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same as creation of it."[32] With net.art, western art has grudgingly given the spectator/aesthete a participatory role at par with the artist.

### The Power Dynamics of the Gaze and the Glance

Coming back to the *gaze*, (the consumptive mode of immediacy) and its embedded ideological implications, Guy Debord in his *The Society of the Spectacle*, elaborates on the dehumanising aspect of being a mere spectator. The *gaze* is passive, complacent. It is devastating to be gazed at.[33] In formal terms, the desire for immediacy implies the desire to get beyond the medium to the objects of representation themselves. For feminists, the technologies of transparent immediacy enact a gendered form of looking. The desire for visual immediacy is a heterosexual male desire that takes on overt sexual meaning when the object of representation, and therefore desire is a woman. If the aim of the *gaze* is voyeuristic, the spectator is practising the traditional male *gaze*. However, if the aim is union, then the desire for immediacy could be interpreted in Lacanian terms as the longing *gaze* of the mirror stage. This mirror stage is seen as a desire to return to the original state of union with the mother, prior to the split that defined the subject and simultaneously privileged the male realm of the Symbolic over the realm of the Imaginary.[34] On the other hand, Corraine Gamman suggested that the female gaze could be distinguished from the male gaze by its multiplicity, a series of looks from various perspectives, a series of *glances*.[35] Attempts to subvert perspective can then be interpreted as attempts to subvert the gaze. In dialogism a totalistic hegemonic gaze is sought to be replaced by a mutual gaze of equality. Martin Buber's attempt has been to urge the viewer into a relationship to supplant the *I-it* relationship with the *I-thou* relationship.[36]

### Narrativity: Arts of Space, Time and Connectance

The literary arts and visual arts have been characterised as "temporal" and "spatial," that is arts such as poetry and music are arts of *succession*, whereas arts such as painting and architecture are arts of *simultaneity*. Temporal narration is generally understood as an episodic, chronological unfolding, words in a sentence, chapters in a book, narration in a film, song, musical composition. In pictorial narration, chronological time has to be "arrested" as a significant movement, through clusters of information, figurations organized in space, and hence considered a spatial art.

Web art is both spatial and temporal, an art of succession and simultaneity, not just perceptually but anatomically too. The emphasis is on user-driven connectance, navigation through space and time into an undefined/unframed, and fluid, mutable third dimension. In that sense it can be considered a navigational art, an art of connectance.

In the spatial/visual arts, the traditional view focused on identifying the *punctum temporis*, or instant, which combines all necessary cues in one simultaneous assembly. These ideas were taken up by Lessing and woven into the fabric of his Laocoon, which systematically distinguished between the arts of time and the arts of space. "Paintings can . . . only represent a single moment, which best

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allows us to infer what has gone before and what follows." Lessing further elaborates, "The artist can never use more of ever-changing reality, than one single moment of time and if he is painter he can only look at this moment from a single aspect. . . ." Thus the artist was driven in the interest truth to concentrate more and more on the task of giving, in John Constable's words, "one brief moment caught from fleeting time, a lasting and sober existence."[37]

Ratan Parimoo has rightly observed that the European approach to pictorial composition is to emphasize the central action, select the most pregnant moment, to create a depiction that may suggest what has happened before and what is going to follow. In Indian paintings the central action is not accentuated. Characteristic of Indian paintings is the use of the method of "continuous narration," i.e., several episodes may be combined in one frame.[38]

E.H. Gombrich, drawing on concepts such as "temporal integration" (the bundling together in one extended stretch of time of memories and expectations) and Gestalt psychology, suggests that the old distinction between the arts of time such as music and poetry, and the arts of space such as painting and architecture is barren and misleading. In listening to music, the moment is as it were spread out to a perceptual span in which immediate memory and anticipation are both phenomenally present. The understanding of speech would not be possible if we lived in too narrow a present. For in music, no less than in speech what comes after affects what has come before. Music and poetry are not so exclusively arts of succession, as much as paintings and sculpture are not so clearly arts of arrested movement.[39]

K. Raja observes that Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa* theory is quite in keeping with the modern Gestalt psychology, which believes in the primacy of Gestalten.

> We have in experience in all cases of temporal and spatial series the knowledge of wholes, which preserve the internal relation obtaining among their component members. When the present is considered as an instant it is difficult to explain how simultaneity and succession are compatible in the same act of the mind. The modern psychologists have shown that even the present has duration of its own and extends both backward into the past and forward into the future. Thus, there is a simultaneous perception of all the letters of a word though we successively hear these. So also in visual perception, things are cognised as wholes.[40]

The micro-units in continuous narration can be considered as information niches occupying a specific width and trophic hierarchy in the pictorial space. Perhaps crucial to the epistemic dynamics is the energy exchange between the micro-units. How do we trace/map the energy pathways in a "meaning web?" How do the morphological and physiological dimensions interact and stimulate the flow of meaning in a particular environment context? While we are aware that micro-units/words/the linguistic/pictorial signs give their own meanings, the problem is to find out where the element of the relation between the word meanings comes from. It may be productive to examine a perceptual

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and a systematic dynamic. Understood in the context of energetics and nutrient cycles in ecosystem dynamics exchanged through food webs, what is the relationship between patterns of productivity (meaning generation), energy (meaning) concentrations and environmental/contextual factors? What is the contribution of detritus pathways, or how are residual meanings regenerated in subsidiary pathways and re-cycled back into the meaning web? How do we map the transformation and translocation of energy (*Pl.* 101)? The entire web is interconnected; energy from one "meaning web" in a particular environment can be transformed/translocated (through links) in another meaning-web/web-site. Meaning expansion efficiency is determined by the efficiency with which meaning production at each trophic level can be converted into production at the higher trophic level. Can this be measured as a qualitative rather than a quantitative transformation? It is also crucial to understand that the *meaning-chain* efficiency of the world is wide web dependent on exploitation efficiency, assimilation efficiency and net production efficiency.

## Web Narrativity: *Ākāṅkṣā*, the Compositional Principle of Desire

Narrative transaction is established between the narrator and listener (or reader) in the process of reading a text. In painting narrative transaction is established between the narrator and onlooker through narrative statements contained in clusters of figuration. In web based net.art narrative transaction is enacted, through a fluidly mutating connection between writer, interface and reader, a fluidity of movement where inside is constantly becoming outside and the outside becoming inside. Web narrativity can be considered a hybrid of "lexia-link and thought." A narrative strategy that Gerad Genette has called metaplasis, the merging of diegitic levels that normally would be kept distinct.[41] The narrative is presented as an assemblage — fragmented lexia and links rather than a unified text, held together by the compositional principle of desire. Or *ākāṅkṣā*,[42] translated as the mutual expectancy of words, the syntactic need one word (broadly representative of the linguistic sign) has for another in a sentence, in order to convey the interrelation of the words. According to the Advaita Vedāntins, there is *ākāṅkṣā* between words, not only when one actually implies the other, but when it may possibly imply it, *utthāpya-ākāṅkṣā* or potential expectancy which can be roused if necessary.[43] Dehejia suggest that *ākāṅkṣā* implies not only the *śabda* incomplete as it stands, but equally importantly suggest *jijñāsā* or desire on the part of the listener to complete what is missing in order to arrive at a full and proper *artha*. *Ākāṅkṣā* can also be extended to included *dhvani* or suggested meaning in general.[44]

Perhaps now after the linguistic turn has yielded so many important insights, it is time to turn to a careful consideration of what difference a medium makes; undertake as Katherine Hayles suggests, a media-specific analysis and move from the language of "text" to a more precise vocabulary of screen and page, digital programme and analogue interface, code and ink, mutable image and durably inscribed mark, texton and scripton, computer and book[45] (printed/painted image) Hayles has suggested eight such differences.[46] Particularly significant is the fact that a new medium will enact a new kind of subjectivity. Hayles connects the signifying process (unlike more traditional semiotics)

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with actual technologies of signification, and further suggests that the technologies themselves are not only transmitters, but may also re-orient, re-process and re-interpret the system; she thus foregrounds the material conditions of signification and subjectivity.[47]

With print fiction the reader decodes a durable script to create, in her mind, a picture of the verbally represented word. With an electronic text the encoding/decoding operation are distributed between the writer, computer as active cognizer and reader. The writer encodes, but the reader does not simply decode what the writer has written. Rather the computer decodes the encoded information, performs the indicated operations and then re-encodes the information as flickering images on the screen. The transformation of the text from a durable inscription into a flickering signifier means that it is mutable in ways that print is not, and this mutability (changes in screenic text such as changing font, colours, type, sizes, formatting, etc.) serves as a visible mark of the multiple levels of encoding/decoding intervening between user and text.[48]

**Web Narrativity: Co-existence of Sequence and Simultaneity**

Sequence in web-narrativity is constructed by accumulating a string of present moments when the reader clicks on links, as if selecting beads to string for a necklace. In contrast to sequence is the simultaneity of the computer programme. Within the non-Cartesian space of computer memory, all addresses are equidistant, so all lexias are equally quick to respond to the click of the mouse. This situation reverses our usual sense that time is passing as we watch. Instead time exists in its entirety, and we create sequences and chronology by choosing the portions of the river to sample. There thus arises a tension between the lexias chosen by the reader and the simultaneity of computer memory space in which all lexias always already exist. The tension marks the difference between the narrator's life as the reader experiences it and that life as it exists in potentiality in which everything could have been different and already is.[49] Bhartṛhari explains this "time factor" by suggesting that speech essence, which is the ultimate reality and is the nature of consciousness, has neither beginning nor end and is unchanging; but on the basis of its various powers such as Time, which though in essence identical with it, seems to be different, the phenomenal world appears as evolutionary and pluralistic. The *śabda-tattva* is not limited by time; the eternal timeless appears as changing owing to the working of the time factor.[50]

**Net.art Aesthetics: Contemplation and Speed**

The multi-sequentially of the windowed-style provides freedom from authorial hierarchy and the fixity of the circumscribed meaning. It also encourages the viewer's participation in realising form and producing meaning. It would be naive however, to subscribe to all "participation" and "viewer control" as an engagement with the artwork. We need to distinguish between meaningful interactivity, and interactivity and multisequentiality that is merely preoccupied with demonstrating technology. Push a button, something happens. Put in money, out comes the candy bar.

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We are quite aware of "compulsive movement" that we all succumb to in our interaction with media, such as channel surfing or impatient internet browsing, often aimless, where we flit from window to window. Nancy Adajania's anxiety regarding de-mat art is not unduly alarmist.

> The momentariness of new de-mat art experience will perhaps negate the values of more conventional artworks: those of contemplative energy, poised presence, critical subversion and robust affirmation.[51]

Cultural theorists Paul Virilio asks, "And what if the primary goal of travel was not to 'go' somewhere, but simply no longer be where one is?"[52] Nancy Adajania further continues her cautionary tale,

> When the viewer/user is clicking/jumping from one hypertext to another, she is always on the move but motion is not movement, just as speed is not a guarantee of arrival or even discovery. Motion and speed become goals in themselves and this is a dangerous development. In this dromomaniac environment we may become a superhuman species but we would lose the possibilities of wonderment that go with being human.[53]

To speculate a digital aesthetics, which would provide an antidote to the dromological speed I would like to draw a line connecting a few unrelated dots. The Ajanta Frescoes, John Cage's musical composition, 4'33 and Roland Barthes' essay "From Work to Text." The picture I attempt to trace out is not a linear historical timeline, nor a cause-and-effect chain, but a moving spotlight, which illuminates some of my points of reference.

In recent years, the understanding of the relationship between literary works and mono and multi-sequentiality has been enhanced by discussions on hypertexts, ignited by the internet and various new possibilities for linking fragments of texts, images, movements (animation), and sound signals to create new kinds of multi-sequential works. The hypertext pre-empts as a technological reality what Barthes elucidated in his essay as a metaphorical possibility. In Barthes' influential essay, "From Work to Text," the *text* is experienced only in an activity of production. The *text*, then, is not the physical entity that sits on a bookshelf, but something that comes into existence only as it is done/engaged with. According to Barthes, only certain types of *works* can be produced as *texts*. Some *works* tend to represent an attempt to circumscribe meaning; others require the reader to co-author the *text*. "The Text is not a coexistence of meanings but a passage, a traversal. Thus it answers not to an interpretation even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination."[54]

Hypertext does not prescribe a path; rather the artwork is a narrative field, through which the reader can wander at will. In facilitating a field for the reader-as-writer, audience as artist, the *text* facilitates a jouissance in "that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate."[55]

The perpetual mode of the Ajanta style, the scanning vision it induces, is a powerful illustration of tactile unified field awareness that imposes its own non-lineal, atemporal, or non-sequential

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scheme on narrative technique. At Ajanta, while a figure will be represented in successive events of the story, the eye does not read their sequence in linear time, as in continuous narrative in western medieval art. In the latter, the painter leads the eye by clear linear steps from left to right, up or down, from the first event in the story to its conclusion.

In the perceptual mode of the Ajanta style,

> Past and future are simultaneously apprehended as the eye moves in a circular direction round the events without coming to rest at the still point of the turning world — because to the Indian concept of cyclical time, there is no such point. (Nor is there what we call the vanishing point of the Renaissance perspective.) It could be said that the Ajanta artist is concerned with the order of sensuousness as distinct from the order of reason.[56]

Again,

> The tempo of slow discovery is very precisely calculated, and achieved from a controlled use of almost equal tones in the variation of local colour. Because of this tonal equality, one is constantly discovering new figures which were unseen through the deliberately unaccented or suppressed tonality of detail.[57]

Richard Lannoy further elaborates,

> In the subtle inequality of emphasis between an unaccented one in juxtaposition with it (the latter at first unnoticed) lies the chromatic basis of this style and the key to the value it so reticently asserts. For the act of discovery whereby we only very gradually absorb the components of a given fresco is not as in more familiar narrative styles, primarily based on gestures, actions, the directions of a glance, *but an evoked sensation of touch through colour and tone*.[58] (emphasis added)

The viewer is so involved in this optical assimilation that his relation to the other figure only proceeds gradually from the tactile to the emotional recognition of its significance. It cannot be reduced to verbal interpretation, as it is pure tactile sensation. The eye is subordinate to a total receptivity of all senses. Here the eye functions quite differently from its linear reading of a flat image. It explores the non-visual properties of spatial forms[59] (*Pls.* 102-104).

The tonal equality in the colours used in the Ajanta finds an echo in Barthes *jouissance*, "in a space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate."

Richard Lannoy notes that the figures in Ajanta are advancing towards the viewer from an undefined somewhere, a feature also noticed Stella Kramrisch,[60] among others. And it is this undifferentiated continuum that has been appropriately linked to the Buddhist concept of *śūnya* — the void — not negation, but inexhaustible potentiality.[61]

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John Cage has played a pioneering role in demonstrating the concept of "interactivity" in his musical composition *4'33* (1952), where he starts with silence. The accidental sounds of the audience and environment are the content of four-and-a-half minutes of heightened sensibility. From a meaningless void, a silence, "inaudible" sounds start emerging as distinct elements through a gradual process of differentiation (parallel to the slow tempo of discovery achieved in the Ajanta Frescos). The process of heightened listening "produces" the sounds from an undifferentiated continuum. The silence transforms from a void to an inexhaustible potentiality.

Barthes, Ajanta frescos and John Cage provide resonances in conceptual/formal approaches for the slow blossoming of meaning, strategies of "finding, not losing." In Ajanta the figures seem to approach from a groundless surface, in John Cage's *Silence* there is a surface, less depth from which sounds gradually emerge.

### A Functional Aesthetic or *Rasadhvani*: A Tonal Discourse

At this juncture it may be interesting to examine Brett Stalbaum's anti-aesthetic proposition for a practical functional aesthetic based on the quality of human mechanic interaction as a measure of speed/time. This he considers is most suitable for net.art that he considers primarily suited to conceptual art practice. He maintains that speed is a fundamental descriptive quality of net.art with aesthetic implications. He explains that a work is fast or slow as regards the conceptual depth of the artwork relative to the breadth of its implementation. As net art is a media which allows authorial choice between the poles of fast and slow he proposes a functional aesthetic ground which evaluates net.art work on the basis of how it is cognised by its user, as a comparative parameter based on the functional paradigm of productivity — the function of time it takes a reasonable viewer to comprehend its conceptual function. In Stalbaum's evaluation, fast net.art lends itself to the hyperactivated art audience seeking concept and idea.[62] He is of the opinion that,

> Whereas the visual appearance of net.art is best thought of as supportive and functional, it is the implementation of time via the breadth of the hypertext, relative to the conceptual depth of the work in which this important aesthetic quality of the work is expressed.[63]

Whereas Stalbaum's aesthetic proposition considers production efficiency, it does not consider exploitation, assimilation efficiencies and associated parameters. His aesthetic proposition needs to be evaluated against an observation by Melinda Wearne, from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. She argues that the structural aesthetics of interactivity in CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) has not yet grasped the operation of affect. Using the example of her own work, *Boxes*, an interactive site dealing with endemic depression, she argues for the structuring of a new aesthetics that includes such techniques as tone modulation rather than simply focusing upon complex narrative pathways and win/lose situations.[64]

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Tonality can temper speed and transform its disperse, nervous energy to the suggestive power of language or *vyañjana* as elucidated by Anandvardhana in *Dhvanyāloka*, where he extends the theory of literal and metaphorical meaning to include emotive and associative meaning also under linguistic meaning. Anandavardhana did not confine himself to words and sentences as indicators of meaning; he included all the contextual factors, the intonation, stress, gestures and even pure sounds used in utterance, as well as the literal sense, as indicators of the full meaning of an utterance.[65] Ānandavardhana uses the term *dhvani* for his theory of poetic suggestion.[66] Strictly speaking, the doctrine of *dhvani*, is only an extension of the *rasa* theory propounded by the ancient sage Bharata, according to which the main object of a dramatic work is to rouse a *rasa* or an aesthetic emotion in the audience.[67] Hence Abhinavagupta's *rasadhvani* (a correspondence between an expansion of meaning reverberating from the art/object and the expansion of *rasa* towards an exalted state of wonderment) is critical formulation in Indian aesthetics and could offer interesting insight in the context of web narrativity and the appreciation suggestive power of lexia and links in net.art.

For symbols, if the word should at all be used, in the Indian tradition, are not mere sterile images but images pregnant with meaning created with a language that is not only beautiful on the surface but that carries within it seeds of *dhvani*.[68] An aesthetic of web narrativity, that would eliminate whole areas of human discourse as meaningless and unintelligible, has little significance for human culture. As Bergson says,

> Language is incapable of apprehending and expressing reality but language may be used in another way not to represent, but to bring the hearer to a point where he himself may transcend knowledge and pass to incommunicable insight. It is a dialectical ladder which, when we have ascended, may be kicked away.[69]

This insight and intuition cannot be expressed directly by words, but can be communicated through the power of suggestion.

**Notes and References**

1. Pierre Lévy, *Cyberspace as a Metaevolutive Step*, University at Quebec at Trois — Riveres, Dept. of Social Communications. www.planetworkers.org/presenters/levy.text.html.
2. Net.art is a broad descriptor for artwork produced using media specific agency of the Internet to create art that is specifically designed for circulation and consumption on the World Wide Web. An important feature of projects realised on the www is that they can be updated and changed, so there is never a fixed and ready creation or 'work'. Net.art works are temporary, and as unstable as the networks themselves. The main tool of net.art is the hyperlink through which millions of www documents are potentially linked on which artists and designers can draw.
3. According to Katherine Hayles, the flickering signifier evolves from its Saussurian counterpart through the development and experience of information technology. If floating signification was conceptualized to explain the arbitrary interconnections between signifier and signified, then Hayles' flickering signifier makes these connections even more precarious through the introduction of randomness and uncertainty into the signifying equation, making it possible for the individual subject to experience

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signifying systems that shift or mutate, an impossibility in the Saussurian model.

4. Bo Kampmann Walther, *Questioning Digital Aesthetics*, www.dichtung-digital.de/2000/Walther-22Aug.
5. Turkle as cited by Steven Johnson in *Interface Culture*, Basic Books, San Francisco, 1997, pp. 82-83.
6. Steven Johnson, *op. cit.*,1997, p. 42.
7. Randall Packer, *Net.art as Theater of the Senses A Hyper Tour of Jodi and Grammatron*, www.walkerart.org/gallery9/beyondinterface/packer senses.html.
8. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, have elaborated the tropes of Immediacy and hypermediacy in MIT Press, Massachusetts,Cambridge, 1999.
9. Richard Lanham, *Electronic Word, Democracy, Technology and the Arts*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
11. Philip Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, Allen Lane, London, 1983, p. 385.
12. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, University of Chicago Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 30.
13. *Ibid*, p. 25.
14. Kathleen Fisher, 'Supporting Knowledge Construction and Reflection', *Vivek: a Quarterly in Artificial Intelligence*, Volume (9) 2, 1996, National Centre for Software Technology, Second Special Issue on Cognitive Bases of Learning, Based on Workshop conducted at the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, TIFR, Mumbai, pp. 18-34.
15. H.D. Kumar, *Modern Concepts of Ecology*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1977, p. 5.
16. Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1971, p. 54.
17. Tagore as cited by Harsha V. Dehejia, *The Advaita of Art*, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996, p. 47.
18. Straus as cited by Ratan Parimoo, 'Towards a Possible Narrative in Indian Painting', *Journal of the M.S.Univercity of Baroda*, Humanities, Vol. XLIII, No. 1, 1993-94, Vadodara, pp. 21-22.
19. William Mitchel as cited by Bolter and Grusin in *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 31.
20. Norman Bryson as cited by Bolter and Grusin in *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, p. 54.
21. Bolter and Grusin in *Remediation, Understanding New Media*, p. 41.
22. Vannevar Bush cited by Thompson in *The Work of Art in the Age of Digital (Re) Production*, 1998. http://www//users.ox.sc.uk/~scat0385/worl.html>
23. Kathleen Fisher, 'Supporting Knowledge Construction and Reflection', *Vivek: a quarterly in artificial Intelligence*, volume 9(2), 1996, National Centre for Software Technology, Mumbai, pp. 18-34.
24. *Ibid.*
25. As K. Kunjunni Raja has explained in *Indian Theories of Meaning*, the *sphoṭa* is not the idea or the meaning, but is the indivisible symbol, which brings to light the idea of the thing meant. The theory of *sphoṭa* is one of the most important contributions of India to the central problem of semantics in general linguistics. It maintains that a word or a sentence is to be considered not as a concatenation made up of different sound units arranged in a particular order, but mainly as a single meaningful symbol. The word or the sentence thus considered as a single meaningful symbol is called the *sphoṭa*. Each sound helps in manifesting this *sphoṭa* the first one vaguely, the next one more clearly and so on, until the last

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one, aided by impressions of the preceding perceptions, reveals it clearly and distinctly. The articulated sounds used in linguistic discourse are merely the means by which the symbol is revealed; it is the symbol, which is the meaning bearer. It may also be called the word or sentence considered from the semantic aspect. It is indivisible and has no time-order. The articulated sounds with the time-order are resorted to only as a means of revealing this symbol.

26. Harold G. Coward, *Bhartṛhari*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1976, p. 82.
27. Harsha V. Dehejia, *The Advaita of Art*, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996, p. 31.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
29. R.C. Pandeya as cited by Dehejia in *Advaita of Art*, p. 34.
30. Harsha Dehejia, p. 34.

    The concept of *sphoṭa* allows the *śabda* to separate into its formal element on the one hand and the other, permitting an enjoyment of its formal, sensual or structural aspects *in tandem* with super-sensual expansion and realisation of its ultimate meaning. Dehejia has explained that all *nāda* according to Bhartṛhari is essentially a symbol, a *saṅketa*, and all that it can do is offer hints that a trained aesthete picks up and couples with its *artha* so that the *nāda* can move on to the highest reaches of consciousness and to its ultimate resting place as *śabda-brahman*. *Śabda* as verbal cognition epistemologically functions through *artha* or meaning. The word *artha* is capable of several definitions but even from the dictionary definitions of this word, two mainstreams of ideas emerge. One definition of *artha* is 'use utility, value, aim, interpretation, explanation or purpose', ideas that focus on the outer or imperative aspects of *artha*. The other definition aspects of *artha* is 'substance, inherent nature, experience understanding or essence', ideas that direct our attention to the inner aspects of *artha*. What mattered was the intrinsic quality in evoking a transformation in the consciousness of the listener. *Śabda* and its consequent *sphoṭa* was an agent of transformation and not just communication.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

    *Artha* resides in a germinal form in the *nāda*, the cognition of that *artha* results from the cognitive effort or interpretation of the listener or aesthete, and therefore belongs to him and not to the *nāda*.

32. M. Hiriyanna as cited by Dehejia in *The Advaita of Art*, p. 52.
33. Guy Debord as cited by Margaret Olin in *Gaze*, Nelson Robert and Shift Richard, ed., *Critical Terms for Art History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, pp. 208-09.
34. Bolter and Grusin, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.
35. Corraine Gammon as cited Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 84.
36. Martin Buber as cited by Olin in *Gaze*, Nelson Robert and Shift Richard, ed., *Critical Term for Art History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996. pp. 208-09.
37. E.H. Gombrich, *Moment and Movement in Art, The Image and the Eye*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1982, pp. 42-43.
38. Ratan Parimoo, *Towards a Possible Theory of Narrative in Indian Painting*, Journal of the M.S. University of Baroda, Humanities, Vol. XLIII, No. 1, 1993-94, Vadodara, p. 17.
39. E.H. Gombrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.
40. K. Kunjunni Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, 1963, p. 134.
41. Katherine Hayles, *Flickering Connectivity in Shelly Jackson's Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media Specific Analysis*, Los Angeles, 2000, hayles@humnet.ucla.edu *http://media-in-transition.mit.edu/articles/jackson.html*
42. The *mīmāṁsaka*s first enunciated and the other schools of thought later accepted with slight

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modifications the three factors of phonetic contiguity or *sannidhi*, logical consistency, or *yogyatā*, and syntactic expectancy or *ākāṅkṣā* among the parts of a sentence as constituting the bases of syntactic unity. Of these three *ākāṅkṣā* is all comprehensive and the most important. *Ākāṅkṣā* consists in a word not being able to convey a complete sense in the absence of another word; literally it is the desire on the part of the listeners to know the other words or their meaning to complete the sense. Nāgeśa, the great grammarian, says that *ākāṅkṣā* is the desire on the part of the listeners on hearing a word in a sentence to know the idea which can be related to its meaning in order to get a complete sense, thus the expectancy is on the part of the listeners and not on words or their meaning. It is only in the figurative sense that this expectancy is attributed to the words and their meaning.

43. K. Kunjunni Raja, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

44. Harsha V. Dehejia, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

45. Katherine Hayles, *Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media specific Analysis*, Los Angeles, 2000, hayles@humnet.ucla.edu http://media-in-transition.mit.edu/articles/jackson.html

With electronic texts, there is a clear distinction between scriptons that appear on screen and the textons of underlying code, which normally remain invisible to the casual user. Saying that print is flat and code is deep can summarise this difference between print and screenic text.

46. Some of the major differences that Katherine Hayles has identified between the analogue and digital signifier — the page/printed or painted image and screen are:

**Electronic Hypertexts are Dynamic Images:** In the computer the signifier exists not as a durably inscribed flat mark but as a screenic image produced by layers of code precisely correlated through correspondence rules. Even when electronic hypertexts simulate the appearance of duly inscribed marks, they are transitory images that need to be constantly refreshed to give the illusion of stable endurance through time.

**Electronic Hypertexts Include Both Analogue Resemblance and Digital Coding:** The digital computer is not strictly speaking, entirely digital. Digital computers have an Oreo-like structure with an analogue bottom, a frothy digital middle, and an analogue top. (Analogue appearance typically reappears at the top level of the screenic image, for example in the desktop icon of a trash barrel.)

**Electronic Hypertexts are Generated through Fragmentation and Recombination:** As a result of the frothy digital middle of the computer's structure fragmentation and recombination are intrinsic to the medium. These textual strategies can of course also be used in print texts, but unlike print, digital texts cannot escape fragmentation, which is deeper, more pervasive and more extreme than the alphanumeric characters in print or the lines and colours/dots in painted/printed images.

**Electronic Hypertexts have Depth and Operate in Three Dimensions:** Digital coding and analogue resemblance each have specific advantages — analogue resemblance allows information to be translated between two differently embodied instantiation. Whenever two material entities interact, analogue resemblance is likely to come into play because it allows one form of continuously varying information to be translated into a similarly shaped informational pattern in another medium. In contrast to the continuity of analogue pattern the discreteness of code enables the rapid manipulation and transmission of information. A 'flat page of print remains visually and kinesthetically accessible to the user, whereas textons of electronic texts can be brought into view only by using special techniques and software. The interplay between analogue and digital takes place in different ways with screenic text than with print. Reading speed on screen is typically one-sixth that with print through not fully understood still, these differences are important for human perception.

**Electronic Hypertexts Are Mutable and Transformable:** The multiple coding levels of electronic textons allow small changes at one level of code to be quickly magnified into large changes at another

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level. The layered coding levels thus act like linguistic levers, giving a single keystroke the power to change the entire appearance of a textual image. An intrinsic component of this leveraging power is the ability of digital code to be fragmented and recombined. In addition, the rapid processing of digital code allows programmes to create the illusion of depth in screenic images.

**Electronic Hypertexts Are Spaces to Navigate:** Electronic hypertexts are navigable in at least two senses. They present to the user a visual interface which must be navigated through choices the user makes to progress through the hypertext; and they are encoded on multiple levels that the user can access using the appropriate software, for example by viewing the source code of a network browser as well as the surface text. As a result of its construction as a navigable space, electronic hypertext is intrinsically more involved with issues of mapping and navigation than are most print texts.

**Electronic Hypertexts Are Written and Read in Distributed Cognitive Environments:** Modern-day computers perform cognitively sophisticated acts when they collaborate with human users to create electronic hypertexts. These frequently include acts of interpretation, as when the computer decides how to display text in a browser independent of choices the user makes. Of course books also create rich cognitive environments, but they passively embody the cognition themselves. To say that the computer is an active cognizer does not necessarily mean it is superior to the book as a writing technology. When we read electronic hypertexts, we do so in environments that include the computer as an active cognizer performing sophisticated acts of interpretation and representation. Thus cognition is distributed not only between writer, reader, and designer (who may or may not be separate people) but also between humans and machines (which may or may not be regarded as separate entities).

**Electronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices:** Because electronic hypertexts are written and read in distributed cognitive environments, the reader necessarily is constructed as a cyborg, spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines. To be positioned as a cyborg is inevitably in some sense to become a cyborg, so electronic hypertexts, regardless of their content, tend toward cyborg subjectivity.

47. Andrew Kurtz, Book Review, Katherine Hayles, *How We Become Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics,* Chicago, 1999. http://online.itp. ucsb.edu/online/collog/hayles1
48. Katherine Hayles, *Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media specific Analysis,* Los Angeles, 2000, hayles@humnet.ucla.edu http://media-in-transition.mit.edu/articles/jackson.html
49. *Ibid.*
50. K. Kunjunni Raja, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-47.
51. Nancy Adjania, 'Net Culture, Between the fast and the slow', *The Art News Magazine,* vol. VII, issue 1, 2002, Mumbai, pp. 26-33.
52. Paul Virilio as cited by Adjania, 'Net Culture, Between the Fast and the slow', *The Art News Magazine,* vol. VII, issue 1, 2002, The Art India Publishing Co. Ltd., Mumbai, pp. 26-33.
53. Adjania, 'Net Culture, Between the Fast and the Slow', *The Art News Magazine,* vol. VII, issue 1, 2002, The Art India Publishing Co. Ltd., Mumbai, pp. 26-33.
54. Roland Barthes, 'From Work To Text', *Art after Modernism, Rethinking Representation,* Brain Wallow, ed. The Museum of Contemporary Art, David R. Godine Publisher Inc., Boston, 1984, pp. 169-74.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Richard Lannoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-53.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*

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60. Ratan Parimoo, 'Towards a Possible Theory of Narrative in Indian Painting', *Journal of the M.S. University of Baroda*, Humanities, Vol. XLIII, No. 1, 1993-94, Vadodara, p. 25.

Stella Kramrisch has distinguished two kinds of representational modes in Indian painting, the classical which is exemplified by Ajanta, (the Ajanta murals share their quality with the sculptural reliefs of the Buddhist *stūpas*) the second is the medieval, i.e., the style exemplified by the change that took place after the classical style was transformed into two dimensional spaces fitting next to each other like wedges. The *Paṭas* of Bengal, follow a similar spatial organization, placed against a flat background, the narrative panels are set in a sequential process following the tradition of the ancient *caraṇacitra*. No space is empty or void, near or far, all figure are of the same size. The compositional scheme is isometric, described as a story of continuous succession! In the case of the classical style the most fundamental proposition that Kramrisch has made is that the volume in Ajanta murals, project out towards the onlooker and thus the space does not recede inward away from the volumes, but instead the space is defined by the projection or 'coming forth' of the volumes. This is in contrast to the concept of space in European Renaissance paintings, which appears as if running away from the onlooker towards the horizon within which are contained the volumes of object. In case of medieval Indian Painting, Stella Kramrisch holds that the volumes are reduced and remain at the same level on the ground. Parimoo has analyzed the spatial phenomenon of Pahārī paintings (sixteenth century) as paving the way for narrative art, but also allowing dichotomous extension, that is volumes once again project forward and at the same time the ground stretches beyond, giving rise to the emergence of space of different kind, than evoked in Ajanta murals. Jain painting was hardly preoccupied with narrative episodes therefore space has not been defined within its boxed compartments. On the other hand, Pahārī painting most characteristically, has been concerned with narrative, therefore the intense preoccupation with space on the part of the hill artists.

61. Richard Lannoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-53.

62. Brett Stalbaum, *Aesthetic Conditions in Art on the Network:; Beyond Representation to the Relative Speed of Hypertextual and Conceptual implication*. SWITCH, (net/work/art v : 4 n : 2 www.switch.sjsu.edu/web/v4n2/brett/-59k

63. *Ibid.*

64. Andrew Murphie (ed.), 'Introduction: Machinic Theory, Convergence', *The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 3, no. 2, Editorial, summer 1997. www.luton.ac.uk/convergence/volumethree/numbertwo/editorial.shtml

65. K. Kunjunni Raja, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

66. Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭavāda* lays down in clear terms the foundation for Ānandavardhana's *dhvani*. *'Dhvanirnāma ārthāntaram'* — *'dhvani* is just another meaning. Ānandvardhana's cryptic definition of *dhvani* leaves no doubt that the same word or sentence and by extension an art object, is capable of providing another or multiple meanings.

67. In the Indian tradition emotional consciousness is not the seat of raw or gross emotions not a mere psychological entity, but rather a focal point of emotional, intellectual, and intuitive integration, a point of refined emotional realisation and one that can lead the individual to a heightened state. Aesthetic emotion is not just a heightened state or another type of emotion but emotion purified refined and transformed tighter, new state. *Rasa* is created by the artistic coming together of the primary emotion, the secondary manifestations of the primary emotion and the landscape in which the emotion is played out. It has been argued that *rasa* is an uncovering of that which is already present in the depths of consciousness.

68. Harsha V. Dehejia, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

69. K. Kunjunni Raja, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

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# Part V
# Institutional Sites of 'Indian' Art

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# 26

# Museums and the Making of the Indian Art Historical Canon

*Kavita Singh*

In the course of the decades between 1920s to the 1950s, Indian stone sculpture and miniature painting became apotheosised as the major genres of Indian fine art. Productions in other materials, textile, metal, and ivory and so on for the most part came to be classified as decorative arts. Why were stone sculpture and miniature painting chosen as the fine arts of India? What were the agencies and institutions through which their dominance was established? And was this the only path that Indian Art History might have taken towards the formation of its canon, or was there the possibility of an alternative model? These are some of the questions that I will attempt to address in this paper. I examine here some of the processes and agencies that established the dominant genres of the Indian art historical canon. Taking the museum as a key institution in the crystallisation of the canon, I track the career of these objects within the museum, looking specifically for the moment in which an art historical discourse was applied to these objects and they were made constitutive of the fine or high art tradition. And in conclusion I interrogate Indian Art History's acceptance of these genres, in contrast to other Asian Art Histories, which canonize a broader range of objects within their traditions of writing on art.

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What we now consider the arts of India — analyzed in its Art History, displayed in its museums, prized in its markets — comprise a category that was constituted in the twentieth century. The artefacts that populate this field were produced, of course, over preceding millennia; but the self-conscious category of "art" is of relatively recent manufacture. Earlier, these same objects would have been well-made articles of utility, markers of rank and status, or records of, or propaganda about people and events, valued for qualities other than the "pure aesthetic." The leaching of other meaning and purpose from these objects, in favour of an exaltation of their aesthetic quality, is a modern phenomenon. Before examining the process by which Indian artefacts were transformed into art, let us consider the European construction of this notion of "fine arts," a construction that moulds approaches to Indian art that are current today.

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**The Procession of Art History**

The Art History that we now inhabit results from an epistemological development of nineteenth-century Europe. Prior to that time, the art-objects of today were either items of utility, performing some function in church, palace, or home; or treasures held in treasuries; or curiosities held in the cabinets of princes and merchants. While the exquisitely wrought vessels, furnishings and visual records of church and palace were objects of conspicuous consumption, and treasure-house rarities were valued for their precious materials or their historical associations, secularly held works of art in Renaissance Europe were usually part of collections amassed to demonstrate the high culture, erudition and curiosity of a wealthy and usually noble owner. These were housed in "cabinets of curiosity," which could range in size from a single piece of furniture to a sequence of rooms, in which prized objects, beautiful, precious and exotic, would be kept, contemplated and discussed. Among pre-modern contexts for art, the cabinets of curiosity most closely approach the modern attitude which treats artefacts as objects to be viewed, understood, meditated upon and enjoyed: to be part of the perceiver's intellectual life.[1]

However, a collector in the age of discovery would have had wide-ranging interests and a nobleman's cabinet usually encompassed *artificalia* (works wrought by man), *naturalia* (works wrought by nature) and *mirabilia* (wonders or freaks). Placed together in the cabinet might be pictures, fragments of ancient sculpture, pieces of mummies, costumes from far-off lands, the eggs of strange birds and shells of molluscs, and gems, fossils and lumps of shining ore. This seemingly random aggregation of objects would often be arranged according to an internal logic of resemblance, analogy, metaphor and contrasts. Thus for instance, a cabinet might juxtapose lumps of clay — themselves precious for some supposed medical properties — with conch-shells. The juxtaposition of clay and shell alluded to Chinese porcelain, a highly prized material whose composition was secret but was believed to be an amalgam of shells and clay.[2] *Artificalia* and *naturalia* were often juxtaposed to suggest analogies between the works of god and of man. It was the knowledgeable viewer's meditation on the relationships between objects that transformed the disparate objects into one collection, a significant and signifying whole.[3]

It is only in the late-eighteenth-early-nineteenth century, as the development of Linnaean botanical taxonomy began to influence other fields of knowledge,[4] that collections of curiosities began to be unbraided and rearranged in specialist strands. Thus objects from collections were separated along what were to become the disciplinary lines of geology, natural history and the history of art, to constitute the first repositories dedicated exclusively to science, or to art.

If at this point science was physically disjoined from art, intellectually the natural sciences pervaded thinking about artefacts. The notion that a "natural" order existed for artefacts, similar to the order of plants and animals, began to hold sway, and collections of artefacts were similarly subdivided according to their morphological similarities: thus painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles came to be

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separated each as a separate genus enclosing its multiplicity of species. In time, the Linnaean system affected notions of not just what was collected, but what *should* be collected. The curious, the exotic and the wonder-creating aberration were no longer the most desired collectible; instead the normal, typical object near at hand became worthy of inclusion, as it filled an important niche in the overarching taxonomic structure that had a place for objects of every kind.

Through the application of this taxonomic system, the power to confer meaning on the accreted objects gradually shifted from the subjectivity of the collector to an objective and self-existing Truth, complete in itself even if imperfectly understood by the human subject. No longer did the nobleman-patron stand at the centre of his microcosm, mimicking god as he gave a name to each thing; instead, the professional curator struggled to make an accurate transcription of the laws of nature or history which were pre-existent, and external to himself.

This marginalization of the collector's subjectivity was effected not just by an epistemological shift, but by political change as well. As a feudal polity gave way to a democratic one, the principle of equal rights for all men demanded some kind of redistributive act that would affirm the enfranchisement of the populace. It was at this point that the social location of art was radically changed. One of democracy's most effective re-distributions of symbolic capital was effected through the formation of the public museum. Royal collections were nationalized[5] and learned bodies admitted the unlettered onto their premises.[6] It was here that treasures that previously were private became available to all.

However, making treasures physically accessible to all was not the same as making them intellectually accessible to all. Great disparities in educational level and cultural preparation of the viewers affected their capacity to enjoy and to "own" the treasures within the museum. Thus the changed, democratic pretext of the museum had to alter its very text; its rhetoric of presentation changed from one of a conversation among connoisseurs to one where scholars imparted knowledge to the unlettered. Science, order, reason, became the shaping principles for museum display, and all museums, whether of science or art, sought a methodical and logical arrangement that would explain itself to viewers of every ilk.

Out of the museum's effort to explain art to the public, the specialist discipline of Art History was born. It shifted the emphasis from the erstwhile patron/owner whom the work had glorified, to the artist/maker whose labour and ability were manifested in it. It presented the sequence of artefacts as a history of the artist's unremitting struggle to better himself; to trace "the progress of art and the degrees of perfection to which it was brought by all those peoples who have successively cultivated it."[7] Seeking clarity for its didactic purpose, it arranged objects by material; within that group by region; and within that sub-group, by period. Thus there were galleries for sculpture, easel painting, drawings and water-colours; from France, Germany, Italy; early, high and late Renaissance and so on. Here it absorbed a second natural history paradigm: the paradigm of evolution,

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in which distinct objects became linked together in a linear and purposeful sequence. Each object was not just what it was, but was a stage in the becoming of something that was understood as the aim or end of that art. One was presented successive fictions in which different kinds of artists — sculptors, painters, potters — appeared on stage turn by turn, eternally bent upon refining their skill over the centuries.[8] One learned to perceive a painting as a stage in the evolution of painting; the intrinsic, formal qualities of the picture — seen as an advance on earlier pictures, and paving the way for later ones — became uniquely significant, as a manifestation of the artist's intellectual effort and sensuous achievement. The Siamese twins of "Art" and "Art History" cleaved together here; the object ennobled through the value accorded to it by Art History, and the noble objects demanding that their value be told.

**People and Cultures**

The arts displayed in the first art museums related the history of western civilization. Claiming as its own the art of ancient Egypt, progressing to ancient Greece and Rome, and then directly to Renaissance Europe, the Louvre was the first to develop a "universal survey"[9] of the history of art that incorporated all that it admired into its own past. It was the Louvre model that firmly instated Antique sculpture and Renaissance painting as the twin peaks in the range of western art. The Louvre model was rapidly followed by museums across Europe and in the United States. This narrative transcended nationality, constructing for the western world a heritage that could well be claimed by three continents.[10] This pan-European model persists: no major European/US collection opts for a local, national history, over the benefits of belonging to the great stream of western civilization that can lay claim to simultaneously to Phidias and Raphael. (Strictly national histories are sought instead, and assiduously developed, by the newly decolonized non-western nations. But that is another story.)

For the experts who formed these first major art museums, the greatest triumphs of western civilization lay in its classical sculpture and Renaissance painting. These best embodied the ideal of beauty for which all art presumably strove. The achievements of art from other ages and places could be judged against the yardstick of the supreme achievements of antiquity and the Renaissance. Thus sculpture and painting from other periods was arranged nearby to offer contrasts by which the level of civilization of the producing culture could be measured. As a consequence, sculpture and painting were the two genres that were especially highlighted, with its development from or towards its high point being marked by elaborate chronological displays.

Objects from Asia, Africa and America were plentifully available in Europe at this time. If once they would have occupied shelves in the same cabinet of curiosities as European objects, with the increase in taxonomic rigour, they were now isolated into their own enclaves. They could not be assimilated into the evolutionist scheme of western art, so they were used instead as a foil. In contrast to the reason, order and progress of western civilization, stood the excesses, idolatry and

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barbarousness of the pagan world. Taken out of history as it were, the objects in these collections were not usually arranged according to material or chronology; the firm, clarifying principles of display applied to western collections was not applied to them. Instead, they remained a potpourri of artefacts, booty of war and natural specimens. Ultimately, the only thing that these tremendously jumbled collections signified was their place of origin, becoming a trope for the originating culture; the disorganization of these collections standing in for the irrationality of the cultures themselves.[11]

**Museums for India**

We turn now to the career of Indian artefacts within the institutional framework of the museum. Architectural fragments, individual sculptures and paintings all found their way into museums at an early date, but their metastasis into "art" was a long while in coming. We examine here the epistemological location of Indian sculpture and painting within nineteenth/early twentieth century museums and museum-like repositories, the better to understand what a tremendous transformation it was when these were made to constitute a tradition of Indian fine art.

One of the earliest repositories of Indian art, and one which exerts a continuing influence today, was the India Museum established in London by the East India Company in 1801.[12] It was intended as a home to the collections made by East India Company servants during their years in India. The collections soon grew to be vast and varied, encompassing botanical, zoological and geological collections; a remarkable gathering of Indian manuscripts; and examples of Indian manufactures, especially textiles. The manuscripts, sculptures and other artefacts that it included were a small part of its compendious range, and certainly not the most important. This we may infer as several keepers of the museum were naturalists, and none were 'antiquarians'.[13] The India Museum eventually was dispersed at the demise of the Company, and its holdings distributed to Kew Gardens, the Museum of Natural History, the British Library, the British Museum, and to what is now the V&A. For all these institutions, objects from the former India Museum formed the core of the Indian collections.[14]

The intention of the India Museum, and of other early British museums that took India as their subject, was to

> present to the eye a typical collection of facts, illustrations and examples which . . . will give a concise synopsis of India — of the country and its material products — of the people and their moral condition.[15]

The museums were to present an India in miniature, easy to grasp and comprehend. Moreover, objects in the museum would bear witness to the degree to which India had achieved or fallen short of civilization, fixing the "moral status" of the subject race.

Similar aims informed the first few museums established within India. The first museum of India was encyclopedic in scope; gathering science and art under its roof, it included scientific and economic collections, and selection of antiquities — fragments of monuments, copies of paintings, or

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plaster casts of architectural elements. This was museum established by the Asiatic Society in Kolkata. Founded in 1814, it was the first museum to be instituted on Indian soil. The Asiatic Society museum eventually was transmuted into the Indian Museum of Kolkata. Like the India Museum of London, it was dedicated to the study of "art and nature in the East." Its collections included specimens of natural history, geology, zoology, and antiquities and industrial arts, but its collections and its staff was devoted primarily to science and natural history. Thus, even after it had acquired the railings of the *stūpa* at Bharhut, sizeable quantities of Gāndhāran sculpture, Kuṣāna-Mathurā and Gupta period sculptures, the handbook of the museum's archeological collections was prepared by a zoologist who worked as keeper at the Museum.[16]

While the very first museums on Indian soil were founded in the Company period, the early decades of the Raj brought a special impetus to museum making in India as the Crown sought knowledge of India on its path to power over it. A number of museums were established in the Presidencies in the early decades of the Raj. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of these were "economic museums" dedicated to geology, medicine, and natural history. These displayed raw materials obtainable in India and the processes by which the materials might be mined, refined and turned into products. The express purpose of these museums was to accumulate information that would aid the development of British trade and industry. One assumes that these museums addressed themselves to an audience of colonizers, not commoners: people who effected or collaborated in the British economic enterprise.

During the vice-regality of Lord Curzon, in the early years of the twentieth century, another kind of specialist museum developed. Under Curzon, Indian archaeology received much encouragement, and an important Curzonian innovation was the establishment of site museums, where objects found at archaeological sites were shown in small museums especially built for them near the find spot. Filled exclusively with sculpture, architectural fragments, coins and potsherds, these archaeological museums came closest to the art museums of today. At this time, however, archaeological finds were referred to not as "art" but as "antiquities" and were valued for their documentary evidence about Indian history and the social conditions in India in the past. A sculpture was important if it was inscribed, and an inscription was important if it contained a name, as scholars studied material remains to trace the lineaments of Indian history.[17] A relief carving could give evidence about architecture, costume and racial types. As antiquities were not yet invested with the aura of "art", notions of "authenticity" were irrelevant and archaeological galleries freely mixed original objects and plaster casts. These galleries were seeking to communicate information through the object; they were not concerned with celebrating the object's singular presence.

When the "arts" of India were referred to in the nineteenth century the term usually meant "industrial arts," the living crafts skills that were so admired in Europe, and which were seen to present an economic opportunities for both India and Britain.[18] That the regimes of value then were the inverse of the regimes of value now, is amusingly illustrated by the arrangement of the Albert

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Museum (now the Central Museum) established in 1887 in Jaipur by the remarkable Colonel Hendley.[19] The Jaipur museum was an early instance of an art museum for India, and it was lavishly praised for its elegance, beauty, order, and clear purpose.[20] The building, made by local stonemasons, quoted elaborately from the history of Indian architecture; in the central corridor six frescoes presented enormously enlarged versions of illustrations from the *Raẓmnāmā*, the important Mughal manuscript in the Jaipur collection. Inside the museum's galleries, showcases of the latest design held "a complete exposition of the arts, from enamels to pottery and from brassware to stone carving, of the State of Jeypore."[21] Here is today's museum turned inside out, like a garment hung out to dry: the outer skin quotes today's 'classical' works of architecture and painting; inside the galleries, on pedestals and behind glass, are everyday objects from the bazaar. It is sobering to realise how completely values can shift in the course of a century.

And what of Art with a capital A? Was it present at all in India? In the 1936 *Survey of Museums of India* sponsored by the Museums Society of London, 105 museums are listed as existing in India. Of these, the ones listed as having "art" collections are the Baroda museum, the Victoria Memorial and the Asiatic society in Calcutta and the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. That is because these institutions are the ones privileged enough to have paintings by "Rubens, Reynolds, George Morland, Home, Collier, T.B. Lawrence, etc." The Baroda art gallery is especially praised for housing "pictures of the various European schools in a manner that rivals the best of the smaller European institutions."[22] The Hyderabad Museum and the Rangavilas Palace Collection at Trivandrum also find a place in the category of "art" museums, as they have and display *copies* of western masterpieces.[23] The fine arts belong by definition to the west; whatever Indian carved stone or painted paper was retained in museums was kept for extra-aesthetic reasons.

At the turn of the twentieth century, then, the field of Indian art was constituted, but was constituted differently from the field as we know it now. India had fine art museums, but these were full of European oil paintings and plaster casts of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture; India had her own arts, but these were weaving, pottery, damascening, and embroidery; India had her monuments and sculptures but these were antiquities, useful as evidence of past history but without aesthetic value.

## 'Indian Art has Suffered for too Long . . .'

Since the turn of the century, E.B. Havell and A.K. Coomaraswamy had been defending India, her culture, and her aesthetics against prevailing European attitudes. However, both had begun as champions of traditions of craftsmanship and native design — i.e., of the "industrial arts," which it was conventional to praise at the time. It was only later in both careers that they bent their attention to "fine art" and to a reconstitution of that tradition in India.

For Havell and Coomaraswamy, the study of Indian "fine" art, however absorbing or worthy, was not an end in itself. The true aims of their project to wrest for India a full entitlement to

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civilizational status.[24] Then India could claim to be a nation. "What are the things that make possible national self-consciousness, which constitute nationality?" Coomaraswamy asked. "Two essentials of nationality there are — a geographical unity and a common historical evolution of culture."[25] Studying the cultural history of India would re-awaken the national consciousness of her people and their essential unity; learning that India's traditions were no inferior to the West's would give confidence to the demand for *Swaraj*. It was essential therefore to demonstrate that India's art tradition was as good as, if different from, that of Europe.

Much has been made of the aesthetic "difference" established by the writings of Coomaraswamy and Havell. The positing of an idealist rather than materialist intention in the Indian artist, the shelter taken behind metaphysics and occasionally obfuscation,[26] has been extensively commented upon. So has the rejection of the value of "foreign influence" on Indian art, and the systematic campaign to lessen the importance of the Gāndhāran, "Greco-Buddhist" school of sculpture. Scholars have also noted their relocation of the "classic" phase Indian art from the Buddhist narrative art of the second century AD, to the early Hindu sculptures of the fifth-sixth-century Gupta period.[27] While their opposition to mainstream art-discourse has been noted and analyzed, the moments of confluence with the mainstream are less remarked upon. For instance, both Havell and Coomaraswamy show a tacit and deeply significant acceptance of a western location of "fine art" in "sculpture" and "painting." In 1910, Ananda Coomaraswamy lamented, "Indian art . . . has suffered too long from archaeological rather than artistic treatment."[28] Clearly, his gaze was bent upon that range of objects that had been given "archaeological" treatment: stone sculpture, architectural fragments. It is as though their major works, Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (1908), and Coomaraswamy's *Rājpūt Painting* (1916) and *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927) take upon themselves a refutation of George Birdwood's infamous remark, "Sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India." What was required from them was a precise contradiction: that sculpture and painting had been known, indeed had *been*, the fine art of India since time immemorial. Not only had India had fine arts, it had had the same fine arts as the west; furthermore these were located in periods approximate equivalent to those of western fine arts. Corresponding to Greek and Roman sculpture was the ancient sculpture of India, and analogous to Renaissance painting was Indian painting of the Rājpūt and Mughal schools.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, Coomaraswamy and Havell were not the canonical figures that we now revere. They were new and forceful voices but polemical ones. Their theories about and their positioning of Indian art would for long years remain marginal to the authoritative centres and institutions that administered the field of Indian artefacts. The major museums in Britain and in British India would continue to reflect the "archaeological" and occasionally the "ethnological" approach. The reconfiguration of artefacts as art would occur only in the middle of the century; for only when the Nation had been created would nationalistic theories find a field in which to play.

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## A Pre-history of the National Museum

The full apotheosis of Indian sculpture as fine art occurred in the National Museum at New Delhi. Fittingly, this museum was established in 1949, after the establishment of the Indian nation-state. Presumably meant as a celebration of the Indian nation and its essentialized genius through the ages, the National Museum of India acquired symbolic depth through the very shallowness of its history. This was no imperial museum hurriedly re-named on an important occasion; it was a new museum, celebrating the ancient culture of the young nation, and its establishment was a symbolic assertion of national sovereignty. At last Indian art had found its proper place within an art museum that would trace its history and celebrate its masterpieces, and do so within the context of a celebration of India, the land of its creation.

The idea of forming a National Museum took birth during an exhibition of *Masterpieces of Indian Art* that was mounted in Delhi in the erstwhile Vice regal Palace (now Rashtrapati Bhawan) in the winter of 1948. This exhibition came in the wake of a major exhibition of the *Arts of India and Pakistan* mounted by the Royal Academy of Arts in London late in 1947. The London exhibition had brought together a vast corpus of objects from British, European and Indian collections, supposedly to mark the transfer of power in British India. The mounting of the exhibition involved great expense on the part of British institutions and government, and the cooperative effort, and expertise of both British and Indian scholars. The show has been spoken of as timely gesture that celebrated the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan very soon after the fact, and it has been construed as an ultimate acknowledgement on the part of the imperial masters of the deep level of civilization, and indeed of the nation-worthiness of the ancient land. When the objects loaned from India were returned, they were put on display for the Indian public at Delhi; and when the objects were to be dispersed to the lenders to the exhibition, the Ministry of Education suggested instead holding the collection in Delhi to form the core of a National Museum.

This then is the early history of the National Museum, which is traced in some detail by Tapati Guha-Thakurta in "Marking Independence: The Ritual of a National Art Exhibition."[29] In this section and the next, we will be following her narrative, and offering annotations to it. We turn first to what might be termed the "pre-history" of the National Museum, tracing the events and motivations that existed anterior to the events that Guha-Thakurta relates.

It was inevitable that the Royal Academy exhibition would acquire political piquancy, coming, as it did, just three months after Indian independence. It would seem that, while Her Majesty's Government was acknowledging the capacity of Indians to govern themselves, the Royal Academy was acknowledging the capacity of Indian craftsmen to make art. While there was truth in this view, the exquisitely appropriate timing — and therefore, the inclusion of a number of politically correct gestures — was in fact an accident.

The idea that the Royal Academy might mount a show of Indian art had been advocated in the

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early 1930s by the members of the India Society. This was a group of scholars, collectors and enthusiasts of Indian art who had been appalled by George Birdwood's 1909 "suet-pudding" remark.[30] In response, they founded the India Society, which attempted to popularise Indian art among a British public. In the late 1920s the India Society campaigned most keenly for a "worthy" Indian Museum to be established in London. The Society visualized a grand Indo-Saracenic structure on the banks of the Thames, which would unite within it all the dispersed collections of Indian material — a resurrection as it were of the old India Museum of the East India Company. When this campaign met with no success, they turned their attention to the project of a major exhibition of Indian art in London. This they hoped to do under the auspices of the Royal Academy. The Royal Academy had already made a departure from its policy of exhibiting only British art; it had organized an exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Art in 1927, of Chinese Art in 1929, of the Art of the Dark Ages in 1930, and of Persian Art in 1931.[31] Each one of these exhibitions had met with great critical and popular success. When the India Society suggested an Indian exhibition, the suggestion was pursued. Some funds were found, and the date of January 1940 was set for the *International Exhibition of Greater Indian Art.*

At the end of 1939, however, Second World War intervened, scotching all plans for major exhibitions. Instead, museums busied themselves with wartime evacuations. After the end of the War, the India Society lobbied to revive the project. However, the political situation was utterly altered. As the Director of the V&A Museum said, at this time the Indians

> . . . will be watching closely how seriously we take the whole project, always with a picture at the back of their minds of what has happened in the past. We must see to it that we approach the whole problem entirely free of any suspicion and patronage.[32]

The exhibition was politically sensitive; well done, it could "make a great contribution in linking up (Britain) and India,"[33] but poorly done, it could worsen relations between the two countries. Consequently, the rhetoric surrounding the exhibition moved into a register not seen before in official discussions of Indian art. The exhibition was titled *The Art of India and Pakistan.* Official correspondence now freely spoke of Indian "antiquities" as "art," and it was agreed that there should be a Modern room, however small and poor in quality, in order to show that India was still a culture that could produce art.

In order to regulate the content of this important exhibition, the official art establishment had to take control of its planning and management. An essential step in this direction was the marginalisation of the India Society. As a private group of individuals it was outside government control, and in the notes exchanged by museum directors and the Department of Education, the India Society was dismissed as a "political" body.[34] In its place, the steering committee that was eventually constituted included K de B Codrington, the Keeper of Indian art from the Victoria and Albert Museum, Basil Gray, Keeper of the Indian Section at the British Museum, and R.W. Wilkinson, Keeper of Oriental manuscripts at the British Library, all senior officers of British national institutions.

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Thus the private initiative of the India Society was taken over and turned into an official performance, one of the first cooperative efforts between the two governments of Britain and of India.[35]

### Indian Sculpture on a Pedestal

The fact that the exhibition occurred with full support of the government machinery in both Britain and the Indian subcontinent had great effect on its curatorial scope. With the help of vast infrastructure and sufficient funds, the exhibition was able to borrow and transport a number of colossal sculptures from India. This was a matter of some importance, for prior to this exhibition, the Indian sculpture that was known to London audiences consisted chiefly of small pieces and fragments that could be easily carried but that did not properly reflect its finest artistic achievements.[36]

The organizers of the exhibition were hopeful that the show would be a watershed in the perception of Indian art, allowing viewers be physically impressed by the scale, fineness and sheer presence of massive, subtly carved and finely finished sculptures. As indeed they were: as a reviewer said,

> There can be no doubt that those who confront here for the first time works of sculpture normally preserved in India, will be surprised in a number of ways. Their first surprise will probably be the size of objects made famous by publication. . . . In the same way the question of material takes on a new significance . . . how is it possible, without specimens actually before one's eyes, to conjure up the deep red sandstone of Bharhut, the smoothness of the yellow sandstone of Didarganj, the softness of the rose or bistre tones of the Gupta styles, the richness of the black basalt of Bengal? and so on.[37]

Where earlier the sculptures had been seen through book-reproductions and studied either for the historical information they contained, or had been dematerialized and turned into spiritual entities that presented ancient and eternal values, this exhibition was able to present the sculptures themselves, provoking a sensuous, and therefore aesthetic response to them. This was a triumph for the organizers of the exhibition, who seem to have been in agreement neither with the older British antiquarian attitudes, nor with the spiritualist-nationalist views of Coomaraswamy and Havell. In the commemorative catalogue published a year after the show the key organizer, K de B Codrington, confronted the metaphysical theories of Coomaraswamy and Havell. It is ironic that the project that was initiated by the India Society and that was wrested away from it became the occasion for a polemic against the Society's ideology and approach. As this essay by Codrington has not often been noted it is worth quoting here at length. In the Volume's chapter on Indian Sculpture, Codrington said:

> The study of Indian sculpture has been confused by (the assumption that) . . . it is essentially different from western Art, and therefore, makes special demands upon the critic. . . . The assertion that Oriental Art is *per se* different from western Art is . . . difficult to controvert (because) like all generalisations, it lacks precision. . . . (The

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arts of Asia) have really only one thing in common, and that is that they have only recently become known in the west, and are therefore, unfamiliar, and to a larger extent than is generally realised, still unstudied.

. . . When Sir William Jones initiated Indian scholarship upon the instigation of Warren Hastings, Sanskrit literature burst upon the literary world and was received with acclaim. A romantic age could not fail to embroider upon the age-old myth of Oriental splendours and *Śakuntalā* was hailed as a miracle of poetry. Later, philology in the hands of Max Müller publicised the *Veda*s, as the authentic, antique source of religion and philosophy. So India was identified with religion and metaphysics, and the living realities of her cultural individuality were lost to sight. When, in 1908, the India Society was formed in London, although its instigators were largely practising artists, it was the "spiritual" qualities of Indian art, which were stressed. Its great pioneers, Havell and Coomaraswamy, were willing to develop the same them, and many Indian scholars followed by them. Impressed by the refinement of Indian thought, they ascribed the essential qualities of Indian art to Indian idealism . . . (what is lost sight of) is that India has produced two, if not more of the most material systems of philosophy known to the world. . . .

. . . The critics of the sculptures in the exhibition were obviously surprised to find themselves using such words as 'voluptuous' and 'sensuous' of Indian art. In the face of the doctrines preached by Havell and Coomaraswamy, which stress the esoteric elements in Indian art, the critics were obviously in a difficult position. But art has not to do with what is said about art, but with art itself.[38]

Here then is a third position in the historiography of Indian art, differentiable from the hitherto identified positions of the colonial-antiquarian and the nationalist-metaphysicalist. The position Codrington took was one that was shared by key members of the British art establishment who were concerned with Indian art and who would contribute important publications in the coming years. Scholars and museum curators with a professional interest in Indian art, the group included Basil Gray and John Irwin, all of whom were keen to see Indian artefacts promoted to "art" but who did not agree with the idealist and metaphysical explanations of the special qualities of Indian art, as put forward by the nationalist art historians. Because their intentions are unstated, historiographical literature tends to pass over their role in the instatement of Indian art. Their role and the impact of their publications deserve to be assessed.

Codrington's own interest in Indian sculpture is determinedly formal and material; in the volume quoted above, he speaks of the sculptor's method, material and tools; and of the impact of the art that he has seen.[39] He is concerned with describing the formal qualities of Indian sculpture from century to century. While discussing the sculptures at Bharhut and Sanchi, and Amaravati, he takes

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pains to point out that the intent of these sculptures is realistic and narrative as they communicate stories to their unlettered viewers. When he describes sculpture under the Kuṣāṇa he dwells on Mathurā rather than the Hellenistic art of Gāndhāra. As the product of professional workshops, he says Mathurā sculpture varies in quality but is made with rapidity and skill; Indian iconography begins here. Similar work continues, according to him, and is refined, in the Gupta period, but the apogee of Indian sculpture is in the great cave-temple projects of Ellora, Badami and Pattadakkal. For Codrington, later medieval sculpture continues to be competent, but is overwhelmed by hieratic needs and the huge output leads to mechanical work.[40]

As the curatorial voice of the exhibition, Codrington's version of Indian Art History is worthy of some attention. The following features of his account of Indian sculpture should be noted: first, there is his attempt to find value in Indian art without resort to idealism and metaphysics; on the contrary he places stress on its formal qualities and its materiality in order to bring the way of looking at Indian art closer to the way of looking at art from other cultures. Second, while he mentions the many points of contact between India and the western world (Hellenistic culture in the Gāndhāra region; Roman settlements in the Sātavāhanā period) unlike the preceding generation of scholars he does not exalt the resultant art western-influenced art; in fact, he as much as the nationalist scholars, marginalises Gāndhāran sculpture, finding it irrelevant to the future of Indian art. Third, he locates Indian sculpture's greatest period in the seventh-eighth centuries AD, at the cave temples of Ellora and Pattadakal. Early western scholars had valorized the ancient Buddhist schools, and were thus able to locate Indian sculpture's apogee in the art of Gāndhāra; they deemed anything touched with Brahminism decadent. Nationalist writers shifted Indian sculpture's highest point to the Gupta period when a certain sophistication of form was achieved, and Brahminical subjects began to proliferate side by side with Buddhist ones. Interestingly Codrington shifts his apical period to an even later date, when a prodigious number of monuments were created, and both Buddhist and Brahminical iconography were highly developed. Finally, while Codrington does sweep along from period to period, his narrative is a discontinuous one, outlining features of one age and then of another without resorting to an evolutionist model. Evolutionism is absent until the very end of his tale when he speaks of late-medieval art as mechanical and uninspired.

How did this narrative play out in the exhibition? We can reconstruct some things from the reviews. For instance, "Greco-Buddhist art" was placed in a small room and was physically isolated from the rest of Indian sculpture ". . . standing as it does on the fringe of Indian art proper."[41] The monumental sculptures of the great western Indian caves could not of course be included in the exhibition, as they were carved out of the living rock of mountains. So the exhibition's narrative was truncated, compared to that of the catalogue; it would seem to repeat the conventional emphasis on early Buddhist sculpture rather than reflecting the more inclusive and far-reaching approach of the text. After the very early phase of Indian sculpture the show only had a few post-Gupta works from the Pāla-Sena school of eastern India. The catalogue does list a few Hoysala sculptures as part of the

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show, but it is not clear how and where they were displayed, for the reviewer says: "The organizers of the exhibition have spared us the spectacle of decadence which is normally to be found between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries."[42] Instead, as the section on sculpture had to end on a high note, it presented at its conclusion an "apotheosis," a gallery of superb bronzes. An abrupt transfer from stone to metal was necessary for the exhibition, as the available stone sculptures did not take the narrative as far as it should go; but the transition was un-remarked, with the bronze caster's art segueing into the art of the carver of stone.

We would be justified in reading the London exhibition as the pre-history of the National Museum, for substantially the same group of objects returned to India to be shown in the exhibition at the Viceregal Lodge and then in the galleries of the National Museum. The question arises: with the changed context of display, did the narrative undergo a change? Visually, there would appear to be little change. The follow-on exhibition at Delhi, and then the galleries of the National Museum, displayed substantially the same group of objects in approximately the same order. But the same groups of objects were at this time surrounded with rhetoric of a different kind. Now intended for an Indian audience, the exhibition had to enact a national ritual: visitors came for a *darśan* of the eternal presence of a spirit or genius of India that had been present through the ages. The artefacts in the exhibition were to reveal "the religious thoughts and aesthetic emotions of the people, through all the great periods of Indian history."[43]

As Guha-Thakurta has shown, this was achieved by adopting the nationalist Art History of Coomaraswamy and Havell. Objects were linked in a continuous narrative of progressive development, where the *telos* of sculpture from earliest times was to achieve the refinement of the Gupta period. The singular purpose and unilinear evolution of Indian sculpture — from the foreign influence that came in the Mauryan period but was shrugged off, the naïve and charming folkish art of the early Buddhist *stūpa*s, to the robust and confident Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā and the "classic" phase of the Gupta — bound all its varied constituents into one purposive journey of nation-building. What the early phase struggled towards finally had its moment of arrival in the Gupta period. Buddhist sculpture became the prehistory of the authentic, Indian tradition of Hindu art, which comes robustly into its own at this point.

If Indian sculpture had the unitary aim of evolving into Gupta sculpture, then Gupta sculpture had the unitary aim of perfecting a single theme. Guha-Thakurta has discussed the inescapable presence of the full-bodied female form in the art of Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā, and the ways in which the voluptuous and fecund female is both celebrated and denied. But in contrast to the earthy women of the earlier period, I would aver that the achievements of the Gupta period are predicated upon the *male* body, seen again and again in the figure of the Buddha, the *bodhisattva*, of Viṣṇu, Rāma or Śiva. Subtly rising and falling flesh beneath the ascetic's robes, the in-held breath of the *yogic* body, the eyes turned inward upon themselves — these were the corporeal signs of spiritual attainment, capturing which, we are told, was the theme of the sculptors now. Not only does the *yogic* male

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body allow an escape from the embarrassing presence of the extravagantly female form that is all too common in Indian sculpture, the single theme of the iconic male shifts attention away from the cultic differences between Brahminical and Hindu, Vaiṣṇava, and Śaiva images, further unifying the purpose of Gupta sculpture. With the body of the divine male presented as the real theme of Gupta sculpture, the period became an icon of nationalism, integrating diverse people towards a common and spiritual goal.

As in the London show the chronological narrative of the (incipient) National Museum also broke down at this point. The rather jumbled "medieval" room, which placed sculptures from different regions and periods side by side without attempting chronological or regional groupings might be a reflection on the state of the field, for early studies of Indian sculpture had concentrated upon the ancient period, and later medieval monuments were not fully interiorised by the art historical narrative. But this meant that the phase most prolific in the creation of Brahminical monuments is given little regard. Understandable in the colonial period, this situation — oddly enough — persists within the National Museum today. This is despite the fact that the field has developed in the intervening decades, and medieval sites and schools have been subject to intensive study. Whatever may be the *reason* that the medieval sculpture galleries have remained undifferentiated, it has an interesting *effect*. Early developments in Indian sculpture are seen mostly in north and central India and can be placed within a single and unified process of development. The medieval and later medieval phase is one of tremendous regional achievements — enormous projects, distinctive styles, localised cults and iconographic innovations. But dealing with the particular qualities of north, south, east and west would divide the river of Indian history into many distinct streams. Regional identities would become stressed over the national, and the strong centre would be subjected to the forces of the centrifuge.

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If in the first century of the study of Indian artefacts, stone sculpture occupied a marginal position, it came to occupy the central place when artefacts are turned into art. We have seen that the attempts to instate Indian sculpture as fine art occur first in the nationalistic histories of Havell and Coomaraswamy who felt the need to posit an Indian art that closely paralleled western art traditions of ancient-sculpture-and-renaissance-painting. For the late-colonial establishment, as represented by the organizers of the Royal Academy exhibition, Indian sculpture was the prime genre of Indian art because it alone survived in sufficient quantities, from times ancient to modern, allowing a continuous history to be told. And for the neo-nationalist structure of the National Museum in New Delhi, this continuity of representation from the earliest times was essential because it became proof of the eternal existence of an Indian spirit. Objects in softer materials such as wood and ivory had only occasionally survived offered a discontinuous narrative that bespoke a ruptured tradition. And in a narrative that attested to the eternal presence of the nation, such rupture would come as

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intimations of its mortality. They simply not do.

**Indian Painting: A Room of Its Own**

In both the London and the New Delhi exhibitions, the sequence of sculpture rooms was followed by a parallel history of Indian painting, traced through a series of miniature paintings primarily from Mughal, Deccani and Rājpūt schools. But in both exhibitions, painting is distinctly subsidiary to sculpture as an authentic representation of Indian art. The reasons for this may not be far to seek. In a view (nationalist, romantic or antiquarian) that equates antiquity with authenticity, the relatively late date of miniature painting (mostly sixteenth century onward) inevitably discounts its value. Its range of subject-matter, which includes history painting, religious subjects and literary themes, demands patience and preparation on the part of the viewer; and the small scale of the paintings prevents them from being spectacular gallery exhibits. Indian painting is not so effective when seen in exhibition; instead its intimate scale is better encountered in publication, which better mimics the intimate viewing situation for which the paintings were originally made. The bewildering array of styles is difficult for a lay audience to grasp; it does not allow for a simple discourse of development or progress. Apart from Mughal painting whose refined naturalism was appreciated early on by western audiences, the stylisations of Indian painting would also seem inexplicable and illogical.

Further, at least for the National Museum and its intended audience, miniature painting's association with the princely court would be another reason for its secondary status. Unlike early religious sculpture whose patronage came from the community at large, miniature painting was closely identified with a feudal ruling class. Nationalist populist sentiment had vilified the native princes and mahārājās as decadent and ineffectual, and it was difficult to ennoble an art form that was so closely associated with, and indeed so obsequious towards, them.

In the early decades after Independence, Indian painting remained a secondary genre in the National Museum. At the same time, however, the career of Indian painting outside of India underwent a phenomenal growth. Major museums in the US, UK and Europe became important centres for the collection and study of Indian painting, and a stream of publications issued from the important repositories in London, Paris, New York, Washington, Boston, Los Angeles and other metropolitan centres.[44] A mature art historical discourse came to surround Indian miniature painting at this time. Scholars classified styles, built chronologies, identified major artists and achievements, and built theories of "growth," "influence" and "decay."

The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are important decades in the historiography of Indian painting with a number of scholars, connoisseurs and collectors competing and collaborating to "discover" schools of painting and publish their findings. But among institutions which lent their weight to this developing area of the field, it was once again the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) that took the lead. This time direction was given not by Codrington, but by his successor to the Keepership of the Indian

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Section: W.G. Archer.

Under Codrington, the galleries of the Indian Section had begun with what he called "a chronological conspectus" of Indian history. The first gallery displayed the V&A's few stone sculptures, which included examples from Kuṣāṇa (both Gāndhāra and Mathurā), Gupta, and a few fragments from medieval temples of Central India. The second gallery was dedicated to the arts of the Mughals. Here, cases held jewellery, jades, ornamented weapons and textiles, while carpets and paintings hung on the wall. The third room was devoted to the Company period, and showed various objects made by Indian craftsmen for European patrons, or for western trade. Objects shown here were trade textiles, Indo-European furniture, war booty from native princes defeated by the British, and paintings made for Company patrons.

The remainder of Codrington's galleries followed different typologies. There were sequences of rooms that arranged objects by function (two rooms, for Music, Theatre and the Dance, and for Arms and Armour); iconographical rooms that explained the subject-matter of Hindu and Buddhist works; and "Industrial" rooms that surveyed various craft skills of India.[45]

Codrington saw his galleries as an introduction to Indian culture; using the V&A's premises to fight India's battles for an aesthetic space was not his concern. Thus while ancient sculpture was placed in a gallery of its own, it was isolated not because it was valorized as "art" which deserved to be seen in isolation, but because it was expected to stand metonymically for the ancient period and there were no comparable survivals in other materials. In other galleries, various framing devices brought together a whole range of objects; thus paintings were seen in the "period" rooms of Mughal and Company periods, but when they depicted singing and dancing, they were also placed in the room dedicated to the performing arts. As I have explored elsewhere,[46] Codrington had conscious intentions in following a variety of epistemic forms, but "art" or the "aesthetic" was not, for him, the prime category through which these objects could be made relevant or interesting to an audience in London.

Shortly after Indian Independence, Codrington left the museum to take up a professorship at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. He identified as his successor William Grace Archer, an Indian Civil Servant who had, in his few years in India, shown remarkable empathy with Indian culture, and who had translated Indian tribal poetry and begun collecting art.[47] A premature retiree and an aspiring poet of straitened means, Archer was, by his own account both relieved to find a job and nervous about his capability for it. But as soon as he was installed in the Keepership, he seems to have found his feet.

Archer recounts in his memoirs,

> My first six months went in taking decisions, to make the Indian Section a true art museum . . . there would clearly have to be a purging of redundant materials. . . . Of sculptures, bronzes, textiles and miniature paintings there was certainly an important

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nucleus. But it was obscured by mountains of rubbish. . . .[48]

We note that Archer's aim was to make the India Museum "a true art museum." Nor did Archer see this as a manifestation of his personal preferences and convictions, or of the changing priorities of the day. It was the natural destiny of the collection to dedicate itself to the highest arts, and he was the man to fulfil it. The varied miscellany that was the V&A's Indian collection — reflecting collecting policies of many historical phases — was too untidy and flaccid for Archer's clear purpose. On taking charge of the Indian Section at the V&A in 1949, he immediately engaged upon reshaping the museum's holdings into a fine art collection. On the one hand he attempted to trim the collection by de-accessioning objects unworthy of belonging to a museum. On the other hand, he also sought to increase the collection by acquiring suitable objects through purchase and donation.

Archer's own words make it clear that for him the arts were embodied in "sculptures, bronzes, textiles and miniature paintings." Unfortunately, of sculptures and bronzes the V&A had very little. The collection of textiles was enormous and enormously rich, but textiles were not fine art. Opportunity lay in Indian painting, whose collection in the museum was large and growing.[49] But the process of reshaping the collection was long term. Immediate results could be had by reshaping the display of the museum, and this he did with vigour and completeness.

Archer unveiled his rearrangement of the Indian Section in 1951. Gone were the three rooms that offered a "chronological conspectus" of Indian history. Instead, the first few galleries of the Indian Section were reshaped by Archer into a walk-through of the history of Indian *painting*. The walls of three galleries were removed to form a single long gallery with 19 bays, in which the panorama of Indian painting was arranged, from Ajanta (represented through copies of the frescoes), through Mughal (with separate bays dedicated to Akbarī and Jehāngīrī painting), Deccani, Rājpūt, Punjab Hills (all subdivided into sub-schools or *ṭhikānās*), Company School and Bazaar painting. Indian paintings were now arranged according to period and style, with occasional attributions to individual artists (e.g., Farrukh Beg, Mansur, Nainsukh). And, most unusually for those times, the sequence of bays ended with contemporary and modern works, represented by a few water colours by Rabindranath Tagore and other artists from Shantiniketan.[50]

The painting gallery was followed by a Mughal Room, and an East India Company Room, but these were rooms that showed a miscellany of "arts and crafts" of the period — textiles, jewellery, furniture, weapons and so on. The "fine" art, in the form of paintings, had been removed and promoted to a room of its own, where it was displayed as a procession of art works in a self-enclosed universe of painting. To show it in association with other objects produced for the same patrons would have shifted attention from the object to the context of production: an ethnographic rather than an artistic display. Archer's arrangement of the painting gallery might well be the first time that a western museum had dignified Indian artefacts with an art historical display reserved, usually, for the arts of western Europe.

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Given the enormous quantities of painting that India produced, it was inevitable that interest in this area would grow, but we might put Archer's interest in context of his life and times. While Archer's interest in painting reflects his own training and opportunities, it might also reflect shifts in British art criticism that had occurred during his formative years when he was a student at Oxford. For one thing, there was a discernible shift in contemporary aesthetics and critical writing (by critics such as Roger Fry or Clive Bell) which placed a premium on *painting* as an art. This was partly due to the important and influential movements within modern western art which mostly centred around painting (from the post impressionists, through to Matisse and the Cubists) as opposed to the more traditional reverence for sculpture as the highest of the arts in the premodern period (and as reflected in the critical writings of Heinrich Wolfflin, or Henri Focillon).

The same aesthetic trends also taught Archer to look sharply at "significant form," and to prize especially the "primitive vigour" of non-western art and the cubist revolution. His senses had been trained to look sharply at form; that the form answered to a non-western aesthetic would not be a barrier to his sensibility which had been readied to respond to just such a challenge. Thus he was able to respond not just to the elegance and naturalism of Mughal painting, but to the "ferocious ardour and pristine vehemence" of Basohli as well.[51] Insistently focusing upon relatively neglected schools of Indian painting, Archer was able to communicate the possibility of an aesthetic experience through the kinds of paintings that had been dismissed as odd, fanciful and crude. Using all the power of his unspent poesy, he forged a language for the description of Indian painting, that mirrored the chromatic excesses and the sharp stylisations of the paintings themselves. Through his evocative words, he forced readers to experience an aesthesis; through his exhaustive scholarship he gave the field solidity and weight. While Archer's theories about this or that Pahārī school of painting might be rejected, what remains is the fact that he expanded the terrain of Indian art to include a whole universe of painting that had lain outside the pale.

Viewing Archer's own training, aesthetic predilections and opportunities from our vantage point today, it seems inevitable that he would become a key figure in the apotheosisation of Indian painting. But another and equally vital reason that the study of Indian painting grew so vigorously in London and other centres *outside* of India in the years after independence might be connected to the forces of the art market.

With the termination of British rule over India, the movement of sculptures overseas was restricted, more so as much of Indian sculpture is relief carving which must be extracted from its architectural context before it can enter the commodities market. Ruling the land would have provided the infrastructure and the authority for such extrications. In contrast, the physical compactness of miniature paintings supported a greater ease of circulation, leading to their continued and growing availability within the art and antiquities trade in the postcolonial era.[52] In his years as a curator, a steady stream of paintings flowed into the art market, offering opportunities for institutions to acquire objects, and posing new questions for scholars to try to answer. And as the paintings flowed into

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the institutions, exhibitions, catalogues and scholarly books flowed out of them, swelling the seas of art history.

## Conclusion

In the course of this paper we have seen the apotheosis of Indian painting and Indian sculpture effected in two different museums but occurring at about the same time. It is my argument that the apotheosis is carried out through the application of a discourse and a disciplinary apparatus that is traditionally accorded to objects of the highest value. It is through the application of art discourse to these objects that they acquire the aura of art.

However, the two "fine art" genres constituted here for India — sculpture and painting — are artificial categories. Both are literally composed of shards wrenched out of other, embedding, cultural phenomena that are crucial to their understanding or appreciation. Instead of viewing the objects *in situ*, Indian Art History presents the architectural fragment as sculpture, and the detached manuscript folio as painting, in an approximation of a western model of these arts.[53] For the nationalist art historians who fought for the entry of Indian artefacts into the enclave of fine arts, the strategy seems to have been the positing of an Indian tradition equivalent to the western. And this paradigm continued; as a result Indian Art History has studied Indian sculpture, painting (and architecture) in subsequent decades but without examining the issue of genre.

What alternatives exist? I would like to conclude with a brief digression to the north and the east of our shores. It might be instructive to look at the example of China in which a great art tradition is matched by a great art historical tradition of criticism and connoisseurly discourse through the ages. When the chief genres of Chinese art are enumerated in modern Art History, painting is included, of course, but also of central importance is the tradition of ceramics. In other world art traditions, ceramics is relegated to the position of decorative art. It is not accorded the status of "fine" art, art that expresses the creative will and intellectual achievements of artists of genius. In Chinese Art History, it is. While China incorporated western-style art history, it was simultaneously able to assert within it its own genres, genres that are not granted "art" status elsewhere.

I do not know enough about the historiography of Chinese Art History to be able to locate the impulses that defined its genres. But the presence of a textual tradition of connoisseurship, which has great antiquity and authority has been impossible to ignore, and it has no doubt shaped approaches to Chinese art, allowing it to define its own genres and categories.

An Indian textual tradition also exists, but it is not connoisseurly, like the Chinese tradition which discusses in detail the qualities of a work, or a master's special brush-stroke. Instead the Indian textual tradition surrounding art chiefly consists of prescriptive texts, which prescribe the formulae and processes for the correct making of things. Furthermore, the tendency towards exhaustiveness that seems a feature of so much śāstric writing[54] offers prescriptions for such a wide

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range of practices and products, that the *Śilpa Śāstra*s seem inchoate in themselves, but they can be usefully mined for the nuggets that relate to those artefacts that interest scholars. This is precisely what has been done. Thus while the *Citrasūtra* of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* has been translated and discussed numerous times, the same scholarly tradition scarcely glances at the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* as a whole to understand the embedding context of the *Citrasūtra*, and perhaps to extrapolate what the place of *citra* might have been, in relation to the other arts discussed there.

While much remain to be done towards a more socially embedded understanding of the textual tradition of Indian art, I would raise the possibility also of working backward. Perhaps by studying the panorama of art-making activity, one might arrive at a different assessment of what India's art has been, allowing for a different paradigms that foregrounds different genres within the art of India. To end with a query and an example: given the profuse references throughout history, and the continually high value placed upon it, how might we locate the tradition of textiles within the history of Indian art? But to see this we must swing the telescope around.

## Notes and References

1. For a wide-ranging introduction to the phenomenon of the cabinets of curiosity, see Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985.
2. Julian Raby, p. 253 in 'Exotica from Islam', pp. 251-58 in Impey and MacGregor, *op. cit.*
3. Eilean Hooper Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, London, 1992.
4. The eighteenth century was the age of discovery where each year brought news of new lands and unknown varieties of plants, animals and humans. Many natural scientists became engaged in efforts to understand, classify and contain the new species. Developing a conceptual framework in which all that was known, and all that was yet-to-be-known could be accommodated, was one of the great intellectual projects of the age. The Swedish doctor Carl Linnaeus (1707-78) was only one of many influential taxonomisers of the eighteenth century. He is usually credited with developing an elaborate and comprehensive taxonomic system for natural history. Beginning as a botanical system, his taxonomic system grew to include animals as well, forming a scheme in which all life-forms could be tablulated and located in a model that proceeded from the simple to complex. The English scientist John Ray (1628-1705), developed an influential system in which plants were classified into 'families' on the basis of several points of morphological similarity. Theories of kinship based on the affinity of form, demonstrated to be rational and scientific, naturally had a strong effect on the systematisation of art works within emergent Art History.
5. In 1793 the French revolutionary government nationalized the King's art collection, and declared the palace of the Louvre a public institution in which all could see the formerly private treasures. All subsequent museum-making is in some degree shaped by the radical intention embodied in the Louvre. The Louvre became the prototype of the modern public art museum. See Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Routledge, London, 1995, especially chapter 2. The Louvre was not the first public art museum, only the most politically potent one. A much earlier public display was instituted in 1574, when Francesco Medici I opened his collection, housed in the Uffizi in Florence, to the public. But as it remained a private collection, the public's access to it was only another way of staging power for the Duke. What makes the Louvre the quintessentially modern museum is the

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nationalization of the collections, the idea that it is not just publicly accessible, but public property.

6. The private collection of Sir Hans Sloane became the germ of the British Museum when it was left to the nation in 1750; but the notion of 'public access' was rather different then. Visitors were allowed in groups of fifteen provided their credentials passed official scrutiny. They were escorted for a quick march through the galleries, without time to linger, read labels, or ask questions about any exhibits. The gradual changes that allowed fuller public access were accompanied by discussion that reveal trustees and curators fear of disorderly and thieving crowds. Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 70.
7. Statement of the administrators of the Louvre, 1794, Quoted by Duncan, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
8. The organic model of evolution, of course, was not just one of progress and upward movement, but could equally be one of downward movement and decay. And which model could apply to which culture was often a matter of moral rather than material judgement.
9. Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach introduced this term in their influential essay, 'The universal survey museum', *Art History*, vol. 3, no. 4. The Universal Survey is the authoritative narrative that surveys 'world' art by gliding from one epoch of high achievement to another, linking all in a progressive evolution.
10. The lands ringing the Mediterranean have produced the art that Europe claims as its own, but they include Egypt, in northern Africa, and Turkey in Asia, which has many ancient Greek sites.
11. The science of ethnology, which treated societies as though they were organisms in an evolutionary ladder, has been so thoroughly critiqued as to need no special notice here. However, it is worth noting that the classic method of museum display for primitive objects established by Col. Pitt-Rivers (at the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford), the functionalist-evolutionist, which juxtaposes objects of similar function from many cultures, arranging them from simple to complex, imposes an order and a logic which is outside the producing society. The logic belongs to society that collects and classifies.
12. The continuous history of this museum is well known; it is the subject of The India Museum, 1801-79 by Ray Desmond, HMSO, London 1982. Less well known is an earlier repository that seems to have lapsed at an early date: in 1669, an Italian traveller to London visited the East India House in London 'reported the rarities kept there to "gratify the curiosity of the public". This included various exotic birds, animals fishes and plants from Egypt, Virginia and especially India. But nothing more is then heard of the collection, and by the time a museum was begun afresh by the company in the late eighteenth century, the earlier venture had apparently been forgotten'. Michael Hunger, 'The Cabinet Institutionalised: the Royal Society's 'Repository' and its Background'', pp. 159-68. In Impey and MacGregor, *op.cit.*
13. The first Keeper was Charles Wilkins, a Sanskritist who co-founded the Asiatic Society with William Jones. He was followed in 1836 by T. Horsfield, and in 1851 by Dr Forbes Royle, both naturalists. In 1858, the mantle passed on to Forbes Watson, who is remembered for his monumental *Textile Manufactures and Costumes of the People of India* (18 vols.) India Museum, London, 1866.
14. While the botanical gardens at Kew and the Museum of Natural History received appropriate selections from the India Museum collection, the division of the spoils between the British Library, British Museum and the South Kensington Museum (the former name of the Victoria and Albert Museum) is interesting for the value judgements implicit within it. The British Museum, repository of relics from Egypt, Assyria and Greece, received what was valued as antiquities, i.e., all the examples of stone sculpture including some fine Pāla stelae and the Amarāvatī panels. The South Kensington Museum, established by the Science and Art Department of Her Majesty's government to serve British industry as a design reference, inherited whatever was left. This included individual paintings, but bound manuscripts and albums, being books, went to the British Library. See Robert Skelton, 'The India

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Collections: 1798 to 1978', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXX, no. 902, pp. 297-303; Also, Desmond, *op.cit.*, Ch. 14: 'Epilogue'.

15. These are the words used by Monier-Williams in describing the encyclopaedic Indian museum that he attempted but failed to establish in Oxford. Quoted in 'History of the Indian Collections', p. x, in *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, J.C. Harle and Andrew Topsfield, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1987 .

16. This was John Anderson, Superintendent of the Indian Museum and author of its Catalogue and Handbook of the Archaeological Collections in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, 1883. For an account of the establishment of the Indian Museum and its place in the evolving role of Indian archaeology, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'The Museumised Relic: Archaeology and the First Museum of Colonial India'. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 34, 1 (1997), Sage, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London.

17. Pramod Chandra describes how, for early archeologists such as Cunningham, sculptures were a source of historical information, thus inscribed sculptures were valued over uninscribed ones, and even in these, especially the inscription was valued over the sculpture. See Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art*, Asia Society, New York, 1983, Chapter: Sculpture (pp. 39-80) p. 44.

18. Referred to variously as industrial arts, art manufactures or simply arts of India in nineteenth century museological literature, this category refers to all skilled artisanal produce then being made in India. While the bulk of it was what we today consider 'decorative art' — ceramic, metalware, textiles, woodcarving, furniture making and so on, it included the work of painters working in the traditional 'miniature' style. For an overview of the range of objects, see T.N. Mukharji, *Art Manufactures of India*, Kolkata, 1888. Indian products at the Great Exhibition of 1851 received tremendous acclaim and British design was found wanting in comparison. The Great Exhibition stimulated interest in Indian arts of manufacture; the Department of Science and Art of HM government adopted the official policy of instituting industrial museums in which objects from India and certain other countries, would be collected and displayed. They were to serve as a design reference for British industry which would learn, assimilate and supplant the originals. This is precisely the method by which Manchester mills were able to flood the Indian markets with cheap mill made cloth made to Indian taste and design.

19. Col. T.H. Hendley was a medical doctor who was appointed the Medical superintendent of Jaipur state with a view to establishing public health systems. Clearly a Victorian polymath, he also collected and documented Indian crafts which he published in his invaluable Journal of Indian Art. He also designed and established what is now the City Palace Museum in Jaipur.

20. Rudyard Kipling wrote in praise of the Jaipur Museum shortly after its founding in 1887. The description of the museum is taken from the passage from his Letters of Marque quoted in S. Markham and H. Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, Museum Society, London, 1936.

21. Kipling, quoted in Markham and Hargraves, *op cit.*, p. 9.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

23. *Ibid.* Curiously, C. Sivaramamurti, writing in 1959, echoes some similar sentiments in his Directory of Museums in India, Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, New Delhi, 1959, p. 7.

24. This assessment holds true for Coomaraswamy's writing uptil about 1916, when he leaves India to take up a position at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. From this period onwards, his writing on Indian art is less overtly political and more academic.

25. A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'Indian Nationality', pp. 7-13, in his *Essays in National Idealism*, Colombo, 1909, (reprint: Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1981), p. 7.

26. See for instance, Parul Dave Mukherji's Introduction to her critical edition of the *Citrasūtra*, in which she discusses the writings of Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, which hold on to a metaphysical interpretation of passages in the text, at the cost of veracity. *Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*,

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Kalamulasastra Series-32, IGNCA and Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 2001, pp. xxi-xiv.

27. See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Marking Independence: the Ritual of a National Art Exhibition', in T. Guha-Thakurta (ed.), 'Sites of Art History: Canons and Expositions', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, special issue, December 1997.
28. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Selected Examples of Indian Art*, Portfolio, Oldbourne Press, London, 1910.
29. See f.n. 27.
30. Speaking of a Javanese Buddha image that Havell had praised for the way it conveyed Buddhist ideals, Birdwood said in a lecture 'A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity of soul'. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 4 February, 1910, p. 287.
31. Barry D. Wood, ' "A Great Symphony of Pure Form": The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and its Influence', in Lisa Komaroff (guest editor), Special Number: Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art, *Ars Orientalis* , XXX, 2000.
32. *Ibid*.
33. V&A Registry: S F 47- 45/1420: Indian Section General, part file Exhibitions — UK. Undated note (1946) by Leigh Ashton, director of the V&A.
34. V&A Registry: S F 47- 45/1420: Indian Section General, part file Exhibitions — UK. Note from Leigh Ashton to the Education Secretary, dt. 12. 9. 45, and letter to Education Secretary, 10.12.45 and Letter of Lord Pethwick-Lawrence to Ellen Wilkinson, dt. 27.11.45. All these communications discuss the unsuitability of the India Society for steering such an exhibition.
35. In his note of 10.12.45, referred to above, Leigh Ashton discusses the nature and duty of the steering committee. While the British committee would include the three scholars from London institutions, it was necessary to institute a parallel committee of Indian experts in India, so that the exhibition would be a collaborative venture. However, Ashton says, 'it is absolutely essential that the selection committee at this end should be the controlling body. Whatever difficulties there may be in the way of this, one might as well give up the Exhibition as have it selected with a free hand in India'.
36. Guha-Thakurta, *op. cit.*, p. 31. The British Museum's Pāla stelae and Amarāvatī panels, and the V&A's Sāñcī Torso have been valorized in the literature precisely because they are rare instances of large-sized Indian stone sculptures in British collections.
37. Jeannine Auboyer, 'Indian Sculpture at Burlington House', *The Burlington Magazine*, (Special Issue on the Indian Exhibition), no. 539, vol. XC, February 1948.
38. Sir Leigh Ashton (ed.), *The Art of India and Pakistan: A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition Held at the Royal Academy of Arts*, London, 1947-48, Faber and Faber, London, 1950, Ch.1: Sculpture, by K de B Codrington. Quotations from pp. 3-6.
39. *Ibid*, p. 8.
40. *Ibid*, pp. 10-15.
41. Auboyer, *op.cit*.
42. *Ibid*.
43. V.S. Agrawala, *Exhibition of Indian Art*, held at Government House New Delhi, 6 November — 31 December 1948, Dept. of Archaeology, Ministry of Education, New Delhi 1948, p.13. As Guha-Thakurta discusses, Agrawala was the foremost student of Stella Kramrisch and as such he carried forward the lineage of Coomaraswamy and Havell.
44. For a fine overview of the development of collections of Indian painting in the twentieth century, see Terence MacInerney, 'On Collecting Indian Miniature Painting: twentieth-century Issues and Personalities', pp. 1-11 in Darielle Mason (ed.), *Intimate Worlds, Indian Paintings from the Alvin O. Bellak*

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*Collection*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001.

45. Codrington's intentions while making this display, and Archer's reformulation of the same objects in a fine-art frame, are discussed more fully in my essay 'The Jewel and the Crown: Indian Art in a colonial museum at the moment of Independence', in (forthcoming) *The Politics of Authenticity : The Case of Modern and Contemporary Visual Arts in India*, eds. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Gilles Tarabout and Denis Vidal.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Archer's translations of Oraon poetry were published in *The Blue Grove*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1940; his early study of tribal sculpture is *The Vertical Man: A Study in Primitive Indian sculpture*, London (George Allen & Unwin), 1947.

48. W.G. and Mildred Archer, *India Served and Observed*, BACSA, London 1994, p. 128.

49. Just prior to Archer's joining the V&A had acquired a sizeable number of Indian paintings from the superb collections of William Rothenstein and P.C. Manuk. In the following years, Archer catalogued these paintings and avidly sought more to add to the collection. He gives a brief description of the growth particularly of the V&A's collection of Pahārī paintings — 'from only thirty three Pahārī pictures in 1948, the V&A owned in 1960 three hundred and twenty nine Pahārī miniatures' — in the Introduction to his *magnum opus*, *Indian Painting from the Punjab Hills*, Sotheby Parke Bernet, London and New York, and Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973, p. xxx.

50. The V&A is one of the few major museums rich in premodern Indian art which has also been inclined to buy contemporary and now, popular, art. Budget restrictions mean the collection of contemporary art is not large, but its very presence has significance. In the 1962 V&A Museum Brief Guide to Indian Art, John Irwin's brief introduction to Indian painting describes the miniature painting tradition. It then says: 'in the last fifty years art-schools and contacts with the west have helped to produce a movement in Indian painting reflecting India's position as a modern independent State'. That modern art should be included in the sequence was a concern of Archers: at the time, the V&A had no modern Indian art in its collection and Archer loaned, from his own collection, works by Chavda, Gopal Ghose and Jamini Roy. He also negotiated a long-term loan of paintings by Rabindranath Tagore from the Nobel laureate's son, Rathindranath Tagore. (SF 47 Part XVII RP 1952/3069 for correspondence.) He also seems to have lent folk paintings such as the *jādupaṭas* from Bengal-Bihar but it is not clear that they were placed in a specific bay dedicated to folk painting.

51. These colourful descriptions are taken from *V&A Departmental Guide: Indian Art*, HMSO, London, 1978. This is typical of the rhetorical mode that Archer developed which celebrated the very stylisation that would have made these paintings incomprehensible to the western eyes.

52. Although the movement of Indian art through the art-market remains unstudied, there is a conspicuous surge in the availability of Indian painting in the 1970s. Indira Gandhi's decision to abolish the Privy Purse — a generous pension promised to princely families who agreed to accede to the Indian Union at Independence — drove a number of princely and noble families to liquidate their assets, which included bundles of paintings. Stringent controls on the movement of foreign exchange instituted in the 1970s, prompted further 'informal' export of paintings, high value objects of compact size.

53. In the study of Indian painting a welcome attempt to look at painting within the context of the book-arts came with J.P. Losty's *Arts of the Book in India*, HMSO, London, 1982. The recent work of John Seyller, who subjects Mughal manuscripts to a codicological method that takes into account the physical entity of the manuscript, rather than the painted surface of the page, has also broken important ground. John Seyller, 'Workshop and Patron in Mughal India: The Freer Rāmāyaṇa and Other Illustrated Manuscripts of 'Abd al-Rahim', *Artibus Asiae Supplementum* XLII, Zurich, 1999.

54. 9 *rasas*, 64 positions, 128 *nāyikā*s, and so on and so forth.

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# 27

# What Makes for the 'Authentic' Female Nude in Indian Art?[1]

*Tapati Guha-Thakurta*

The paper centres around the production of one of the most canonical motifs of ancient and medieval Indian art; that of the unclothed, sensual, feminine figure, spanning the spheres of both divine and human representations. It treats the image as it features primarily within the domain of early and medieval sculpture in India, particularly a key medieval temple site. It also presents the image as one with a particularly controversial modern existence; one which has been in need of continuous authentication, which in varying conjunctures has been a subject as much of disavowal as of intense attention and valorization. If the female nude can be seen as the most consecrated icon of European art, Indian Art History, we find, offers a set of parallel trajectories for producing its own discrete and contentious tradition of the "nude." Today, the subject of the erotic feminine form stands powerfully ensconced within the nation's Art History and artistic canon. Mapping the different stages through which the subject came to configure within the disciplinary practices of Indian Art History, the paper explores some of the modes of iconographic and artistic legitimisation of the sexualised female body in Indian art. A number of questions arise in this context — how and when, for instance, does the nudity/semi-nudity of female figures becomes a "problem" in Indian Art History? In what ways has the "problem" been raised and resolved within an art historical frame? And at the same time, how has it been inflected with larger consternation about tradition, morality and national identity in modern India? The theme of female sexuality, we find, has required the continuous negotiation of new sets of distinctions between what is "art" and what is not — between the "aesthetic" and the "obscene", between the "spiritual" and the "physical."[2]

This paper locates itself in two select moments of contemporary history, which have thrown into sharp profile and conflict such issues of art, sensuality and morality in India's past and present. It addresses two contrasting scenarios of celebration and condemnation, both of which have had at their core the lure and threat of female nudity in art. In one case, we are brought face to face with some of the most compelling erotic imagery as are to be found on the medieval temples of Khajuraho — and with the expanding corpus of visual and textual representations of these sculptures in the popular and scholarly media. In the other case, we are drawn into the world of contemporary

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Indian art — confronted with one of the most magisterial persona of this art scene, M.F. Husain, whose representations of nude goddesses have suddenly faced the assault of a new national morality, and whose "defense" has called for an urgent re-engagement with the objects and traditions of Indian Art History. I configure both these occasions as mirrors of the past, which reflect the many discourses and discomforts that have converged around this key motif of the sensual feminine figure of Indian art.

## Celebrating the Sexual: The Spotlight on Khajuraho

Let me begin with the scene of the recent ecstatic celebration of art and erotica of the now world-famous temple cluster of Khajuraho, on the special occasion of the millennium. The temples (the surviving twenty-two out of a original complex that is presumed to have contained over eighty structures) have been dated roughly between the tenth and eleventh centuries, spanning mainly the hundred years between AD 950 and 1050.[3] So, 1999 saw the launch of a spectacular programme of state-sponsored festivities to mark the thousand years of the Khajuraho temples. "The timing," we are told, "couldn't have been more perfect": as the whole world prepared for the madness of the year 2000, these exquisite temples from an obscure hamlet in central India magnetize our attention for completing a thousand years of their existence. The "Khajuraho Millennium Bash" (as it was called) was designed for both national and international publicity: it is seen, as Indian tourism's all-out bid to promote India as a world tourist destination[4] (*Pl.* 107). Clearly nothing in India's artistic heritage today sells better than such a panorama of *in situ* temple sculptures, as is to be found at Khajuraho. And nothing about Khajuraho sells more than what is seen as its unique concentration of explicitly erotic sculptures, ranging from an array of voluptuous female figures to various scenes of lovemaking and copulation. *Divine Ecstasy, The Playground of the Gods, Celestial Erotica, Temples of Love, The High Noon of Hindu Sexuality* — for several years now, Khajuraho has existed in the public imagination through a series of such cliched epithets.

In such an imaging of Khajuraho, we see a continuous overlap of the twin trends of scholarly and popular productions. Even as archaeological and art historical writings have marked out their exclusive areas of specialised knowledge around the site — drawing Khajuraho into an inner circle of connoisseurship and debates about dates, iconography and symbolism[5] — the information they generate can be seen to spill over into a popular corpus of tourist guides, booklets, pamphlets and postcards.[6] In recent years, as Khajuraho has catapulted into focus as a prime national and international tourist centre, new scholarly interpretations have needed to carefully mark their differences from what circulates on the open market. In particular, they have had to distance themselves from what scholars see as the "vulgarization" and "trivialization" of the site by an exaggerated emphasis on the erotic sculptures of the temples. The process of the wide-ranging reproduction and dissemination of Khajuraho — especially the visual proliferation of its erotic imagery — within a mass public domain is something to be studied in itself. There are many layers to be discerned here, as productions

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range from glossy coffee-table publications to cheap postcards, key chains or statues — perhaps even various shifts in choices of images to be tracked over time. The point I would like to stress here is the manner in which the authorised books of Art History have often imperceptibly merged with the more popular souvenirs of Khajuraho in a joint over-play of the theme of its erotic art.

Across the genres, one can see how the "erotic" has served as the occasion for a huge excess of representation: excess that is both textual and visual. The amount of explanation and analysis invested on these erotic sculptures (on its different varieties, stretching from seductively posed women to tender loving couples to extreme and orgiastic sexual poses) is more than matched by the scale and detail of their visual reproductions, where the eye of the camera is able to blow up these images larger or bring their erotic details into closer scrutiny than is ever possible in an on-site observation[7] (*Pl.* 108). To scan through the large corpus of books on Khajuraho of the past three decades is to realise the extent to which the art of photography has manufactured the site in/for the present. It is also to understand the ways the angling and zoom of the photographic frame has served to voyeuristically enhance the voluptuous and titillating details of the sculptures, especially the swells and curves of the women's bodies, or the acts of arousal and copulation. Their accumulative effects have been overwhelming: they have rendered the sculptures of Khajuraho synonymous in recent history with ancient Indian erotica.

It is in the context of such excess that it comes as a sober reminder that the panels of erotic sculptures actually form only a very small percentage of the total scheme of sculptural embellishments of the Khajuraho temples. There are, it turns out, no more than sixteen such large panels depicting direct sexual acts and postures, concentrated only in three of the large temples of the main western group, the Lakṣmaṇa, the Viśvanātha and the Kandarīya-Mahādeva temples — and it is these which have received a publicity and exposure that is far out of proportion. This point has been repeatedly foregrounded in most of the more recent writings on Khajuraho.[8] Such books keep underlining the need for a balanced, less sensationalised view of the art of Khajuraho — there is a plea for perspective, for looking "beyond the erotic," for placing the corpus of sensual and sexual imagery within the overall architectural and sculptural scheme of the temples, for returning these to their integral position within the religious/cosmic symbolism of the temple structures. And this issue of balance and perspective we find is also being projected in the current media literature on the Khajuraho millennium.[9]

To make sense of these shifting approaches and emphases, it becomes crucial to locate the sculptures of Khajuraho within a particular cycle of art historical interpretation. Narratives on Khajuraho, I would argue, have rapidly turned full circle in the course of the last few decades. It is in the 1960s that a site like Khajuraho came into a new focus in Indian Art History as a part of the discipline's growing sense of liberation from what it looked back on as "the shame of the erotic."[10] There is a rich body of writing from the period which plays out this Foucauldian theme of sexual repression and release — which invoked a Victorian past of prudishness and embarrassment about sex and a new liberated present in Indian aesthetics and Art History that was able to unapologetically

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engage with the pleasures and plethora of sexual representations in India's art traditions.[11] There was a double twist to the way in which this divide and break was presented: the false Victorian morality could be read as a colonial Westernised hang-over, and the new appraisal of erotic art seen as a "return" to a fundamental philosophy of Hindu religion and aesthetics, whose lineage began to be drawn from earliest Vedic times to the efflorescence of temple sculpture during "the medieval Hindu renaissance." Khajuraho came to symbolize the peak-moment of this renaissance. It featured centrally within a new evolutionary scale in Indian art history, which sought out its high-points in the sumptuously ornate and sensual traditions of medieval Hindu art and tracked alongside the aesthetics and philosophy of eroticism as one of the enduring "essences" of this Hindu art.

In retrospect, Khajuraho can be seen to have confronted the art historical field in India with one of its major conundrums — the profuse presence of sexual motifs on religious structures. Coming to terms with this entailed a growing charge of explanation. It put scholars through the rigorous test of devising new elaborate frames of interpretation: interpretations which would go beyond the literal to more philosophical and abstruse levels of meaning, drawing on various textual, mythological and ritual references. It also placed on them a compulsion to recover the erotic from earlier connotations of the "lowly" and "obscene" to a new reified status of the "spiritual" and the "symbolical." We will be returning later to some of these interpretative devices to look more closely at the way in which the sensual content of sculptures were both foregrounded and covered over by a veil of metaphysical values. This would be true of the readings produced as much around the pageantry of celestial beauties as around the manifold *mithuna* and *maithuna* postures of couples.[12] For all the call for "frankness," "boldness" and "elemental honesty" in facing up to the central place of sex in Indian art and religion, the physicality of the human body, like the sexual act, had to be strategically sublimated and allegorized. Thus, all the sexual depictions on the walls of the Khajuraho temples became emblematic of the consummation of the divine marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī[13] — and at a more abstracted level, of the removal of duality and the merger of the opposing cosmic principles of Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛti.[14]

All along, the "spiritual" metaphor can be seen to have functioned as a prime representational device for understanding and accounting for the "erotic" in Indian art — for giving its crucial religious and aesthetic sanction. It has paved the main route for Khajuraho's triumphant entry in Indian Art History, marking the passage from the shame and stigma to the pride of its erotic sculpture. What is now being posed as a retreat from the "erotic" — a redressal of balance between the sexual and religious symbolisms of Khajuraho — can be read as a reinstatement of the very terms on which eroticism found and secured its place in the nation's art heritage. That these are also the terms of the current millennium panegyrics mounted around these thousand-year old "eternal monuments of love"[15] show the extent to which "academic" and "popular" representations have blended and blurred in the imaging and packaging of Khajuraho. What is being held up to the world, to a community of connoisseurs and mass-viewers, is not just an array of sensual titillating sculptures, but one of the

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most spectacular and best-preserved group of medieval Indian temples that have today earned Khajuraho the designation of a "World Heritage" site. What have also been highlighted are the newest angles of art historical interpretation of the sensual and erotic sculptures, which locate them squarely within the religious symbolism of the temples. The fact that they are "authored by women" comes to be read as a further sign of the graduation of erotic art from cheap sensationalism or male voyeurism to a properly academic forum of understanding.[16]

**Condemning the Nude: The Attack on M.F. Husain**

Let me now swivel attention to the second sharply discordant scenario in contemporary India, where the legitimacy of any traces of eroticism in religious representations has been called into question. Let us turn to the recent outrage and furore that erupted in certain parts of India over the depiction of Hindu goddesses in the nude by the octogenarian painter, Maqbool Fida Husain. The most flamboyant artistic personality of post-independence India, with a career stretching from the first modernist movement of the 1940s to the poster and pop-art phenomena of the 1980s, Husain's name has come to epitomize the very entity of modern Indian art.[17] It is precisely this visibility and public prominence, compounded by the accident of his "religion," which had made a figure like Husain most vulnerable to the new cultural bigotry of the country's Hindu right-wing. The first target of attack was a fairly innocuous line drawing of the goddess, Sarasvatī, one of the artist's large repertoires of stylized female nudes (*Pl.* 109). A work done over two decades ago (in the 1970s) was suddenly hauled up by the Hindu fundamentalist lobby in India as an "insult" and "offence" to Hindu religious sensibilities by a "Muslim" artist, and made the occasion for a violent vituperative campaign against the artist. Husain's audacity, not only of a public display of nude female bodies, but also of labelling them with names of divinities like Pārvatī, Lakṣmī or Sarasvatī, was seen as an act of deliberate pernicious mischief: an act tantamount (it was alleged) to "the rape of Hindu goddesses."[18] And the root cause for such mischief was shown to reside in "the nature of the religion and culture which Husain embraces."

As is obvious here, the entire campaign has revolved around the designation of M.F. Husain as a "Muslim" artist, producing a terrifying equation between the painter's religion, his so-called immoral passion for nude figures, and his urge to disrespect Hindu sentiments. So powerful has been the logic of this identification that it can completely ride against history — and pick as its target this most secular and open-minded of modern Indian artist, who has always reveled in the multiplicity of India's faiths and creeds and drawn deeply on the inspiration of Hindu myths and legends. In the autumn of 1996, Husain became the victim of a systematic "pogramme" launched by the activists of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which initially singled out this one painting of a nude Sarasvatī as a cause for moral outrage.[19] As the attack steadily snowballed, moving to different Indian cities (from Bhopal and Indore to Mumbai, Ahmedabad and New Delhi), other Husain images of Hindu divinities were pulled into the fray — in 1997, another of his painting of a nude Sītā being carried by

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Hanumān on his tail, on display in an art gallery in New Delhi, incited violent demonstrations. The attacks took on extreme forms — from the burning of the artist's effigy, to the nailing of criminal charges against him, to the vandalisation of his paintings in his art gallery at Ahmedabad and in his apartment at Mumbai — marking its victory in the "apology" it was able to extract from Husain. And the assaults have continued unabated, picking now on Husain's mega film venture, *Gaja-Gamini* (centering around the film star, Madhuri Dixit) as the latest instance of "offence" and violation — whereby, not only was the screening of the film banned in Maharashtra and Gujarat, but Husain was forbidden to even enter the city of Ahmedabad, the city where his paintings were earlier ransacked and burnt. This anti-Husain campaign provides us with the most vivid lesson of the kind of terror, censorship and punitive action that invigorates the cultural politics of the Hindu Right, sparing neither the average citizen nor his celebrity counterpart.

One could pause at this point to ask: is it at all relevant to juxtapose this clearly politicised controversy over Husain's nude goddesses with the national and international exultation over the sensuous women and copulating figures that adorn the temples of Khajuraho? While the latter can be seen as a distinct effect of the claims and persuasions of Art History — of the new fund of meanings it has successfully generated around India's ancient monuments and images — the former phenomenon can be seen to be almost entirely triggered by "external" factors, propelled by issues that have little to do with the domain of art and religion. If anything, the whole tenor of the attack against M.F. Husain has exposed the degree of artistic illiteracy and art historical ignorance that pervades the public visual cultures of contemporary India. It is easy, in a sense, to dismiss the whole Husain controversy as politics in its most ugly form, riding on falsely trumped-up concerns about matters of license and morality in art and about the norms of Hindu iconography. It is also tempting to pass off all the VHP charges against Husain as pure farce, for they so obviously lend themselves to caricature. Each of their allegations about the "obscenity" or "offensiveness" of Husain's images can be easily demolished with a range of counterpoints drawn from India's premodern and modern Art History — as was most effectively done in the media during the time, by all those rallying around the wronged artist.[20]

However, I wish to graft this "Husain affair" not merely on to a map of current political conflicts and configurations but equally on to a map of art historical concerns in modern India. The politics that impelled this campaign, I feel, cannot be disengaged from certain deep, unresolved tensions that permeate issues of aesthetics and faith in our contemporary public cultures. The controversy has thrown open the wide rift (that has been such a perennial theme in European art history) between the nude as an entrenched symbol of high art and as a target of popular, public disapproval, pitting the "aesthetic" and the "moral" as two opposing modes of encounter.[21] This opposition, we find, rests within its own specific troubled history in modern India, where the blurring of boundaries between art, religion and morality in India's past traditions (be it her visual, literary or performative traditions) have been a continual source of both enigma and unease. The kinds of accusations heaped

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on Husain's Sarasvatī or Sītā forces us to rethink the ways in which we draw the line not just between the "artistic" and the "obscene" but also between the "artistic" and the "religious" image: a line that may never have been drawn before but now needs to be established with great urgency. It underlines how the charge of the "erotic" is entirely ideological and contextual in the ways in which it accrues around a certain body of visual images in a certain time and place. And it shows how unstable and fragile are the immunities endowed by the discourses of art and tradition.

In defense of Husain, it became imperative to correct the falsified notions of tradition and iconography that was being perpetrated by his antagonists and explain that there was nothing about Husain's imagery that transgressed the bounds of "art" and "Indian-ness." Let us scrutinize, now, some of the terms of the defense that was mounted around him in the media in a huge show of solidarity by artists, intellectual and scholars. As the sanctified world of modern art was dragged into the murky realm of politics, what ensued was a multiple sense of assault: an assault on the freedom of artistic expression, an assault on modern artistic identities, and an assault also on the nation's art historical inheritance.[22] The first issue became the core theme of the counter-protest, invoking the inevitable parallel with the Salman Rushdie affair, showing how artistic freedom was under a global fundamentalist siege. In this specific case, what was sought to be protected and preserved was the threatened space of modern and avant-garde art practices in India. The charges of obscenity, it could be shown, had little or nothing to do at all with the actual image of Sarasvatī drawn by Husain — "a serious look at the drawing," it was argued, "is sufficient to point to the untenability of this specific accusation." Here is a particularly bony and taut line drawing, lacking in any tactile simulation of female flesh, where the iconographic attributes of the goddess though present are never foregrounded. What such a charge translated into was clearly a wider hostility *vis-à-vis* the very object of modern Indian art, and the freedom and licenses it enjoyed.[23] It reflected, most of all, a series of deeper anxieties centering around the question of female sexuality and its privileged status in art.

Husain's own oeuvre offers a variety of far more provocative and sensuously posed feminine figures whom he has drawn from the world of Hindu legends and mythology, and whom he has mischievously transposed on to the world of silver screen heroines of his time. With an unerring eye for popular fantasy and tinsel glamour, the artist in the 1990s produced new ingenious takes on female sensuality in a whole series he has painted around his favourite movie heroine, Madhuri Dixit — where Madhuri is fantasized in various mythical roles of lover and temptress, where she, along with the goddesses she impersonates, serves as an overt object of the artist's erotic fantasy and obsession[24] (*Pl.* 110). To take the argument further, the entire history of modern Indian painting through this century can be shown to offer many more eroticized depictions of the divine female form, which like Husain's images never degenerate into anything vulgar or obscene, and which seldom go against the true grain of Hindu iconography. One must question, of course, the very power or ability of such works to ever engage with or offend people's religious sentiments. For they

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come out of a history that places them well outside the domain of iconography in a separate sacred sphere of "art," with its own rights and prerogatives, especially the long-cherished male prerogative of the portrayal of the nude female figure.

One can also very effectively juxtapose and contrast these modern artistic representations of the goddess with the images that have come to constitute the modern-day Hindu pantheon. As I shown in another paper, Husain's eminently "arty" nudes have their paradoxical foil in the fleshed-out, "true-to-life," coquettish female figures which have passed from our colonial past into our popular religious iconography — an iconography where the "sexual" has come to be strategically rewritten in the fashioning of feminine images that can effectively negotiate both visual appeal and religious faith.[25]

### Art History to the Defence

Clearly, the issues and ironies of the Husain affair can play off in numerous directions. In the context of this paper, let me restrict myself to the one dominant line of argument that emerged during the controversy that constructed an elaborate art historical defense around Husain, by looking back to India's long and powerful artistic tradition of nude female figures. This is where we return to the canonical motif with which this paper began: it becomes a central visual trope, offered for reappraisal as a prime religious and artistic icon, and made to straddle the vast historical expanse of Indian sculpture and painting, from the ancient into the modern period. Emphasis was placed on the antiquity of this tradition of full-bodied unclothed female figures in Indian sculpture — we were referred back to the statuesque figures of *yakṣī*s (a type of primeval deities associated with wealth, abundance and fertility) that surround the pillars, railings and gateways of the early Buddhist *stūpa*s, dating back to the pre and early Christian era. The emphasis was equally on the chronological and iconographic evolution of these female figures, marking their artistic culmination in the medieval temple complexes of Khajuraho, Bhuvaneswar, Konark, Belur and Halebid. Most important of all was the emphasis on the religious and ritual validity of nudity in the Indian iconographic traditions.

The view that the sensuous female figures in Indian sculpture were primarily those of courtesans, dancers, or semi-divine beings, and seldom of the main goddesses,[26] elicited a host of counter references. We were reminded, for instance, of a goddess like Kālī whose iconography has always revolved around a figure devoid of clothes. Or, of the numerous figures of nude, slender-bodied Pārvatīs and Lakṣmīs of the South Indian bronzes of the Coḷa period.[27] One unusual icon that was invoked in this context was that of "Lajjā Gourī," a popular fertility goddess of the Deccan, who appears in sculptures as wholly naked, with an exposed vagina symbolising sowing, and a lotus head symbolising fruition.[28] Finally the very image of contention — Husain's nude Sarasvatī — was shown to have its lineage in several sculptures on the walls of the eleventh/twelfth century Hoysala temples, where the torso of the goddess is invariably bare and only her lower parts covered with ornaments. Husain, himself, is said to have drawn his inspiration from an eleventh century icon of a

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nude Sarasvatī in the Vimla Vasahi temple at Mount Abu in Rajasthan.[29]

Such references more than adequately made their case. The main point was to stress that the depiction of the bare female body was an inalienable feature of the traditional iconography of Hindu goddesses and that such depictions remained fully within the realm of the aesthetic. Recovered as an object of "art," the nude was accorded the full religious and iconographic sanction of Hinduism and given its indigenous location in the conventions of Indian art. In doing so, a central case was also made for the "Indian" lineage and authenticity of Husain's images. The artist himself participated actively in this process of self-legitimization — in his interviews of that time; he went to lengths to project his art as "a part of India's 5000 year old culture," and to demonstrate how heavily his visual vocabulary was informed by the past traditions of Indian sculpture. He looked back to his first encounter with the sensual sculptures from Mathura (dated around the second century AD) in an exhibition in New Delhi in 1948 as the central formative influence on his work. And, forced into a defensive posture, he underlined how he — not as a "Muslim" but as "a quintessential Indian" — had internalized the spirit and sentiments of the Hindu myths and icons.[30]

I would however ask at this juncture — what has been at stake in these valiant invocations of tradition? Why has it been at all necessary to justify a distinct specimen of modern Indian art in terms of our ancient sculptural precedents? As pointed out by one writer, there was one clear danger in such a stance in that it allowed the Hindu right wing to successfully dictate the terms of the debate. It took on an agenda of an education in Art History for a group of people who deliberately wished to cling to their ignorances and biases. And it presented Husain's right to the freedom of artistic expression, not as a universal democratic right, but one that had the hallowed sanction of tradition and Hinduism.[31] What these positions also amply reveal is the contradictory status of India's modernity, whereby her modern artistic identities and movements require the distinct markings of "nationality" by their positioning within the lineage of the Indian art tradition. The definitions of such a lineage have radically shifted over time, as have the select points of identification and appropriation of tradition — but what appears to remain constant is the desire for a modernity that has its clear roots in the nation's past.

Leaving these issues aside, my interest here lies in raising a different set of questions — in looking more critically at the history through which these particular images from tradition come into the discourses of Art History and enter the broader public visual field. This widespread harking back to the female figures of earlier temple sculptures, I feel, glosses over the many strains and tensions in the manner in which this art tradition was made available in modern India. To begin with, it tides over the lingering discomfort with the sensual and erotic content of our traditional sculptures, that has resided within the structure of Indian Art History since the inception of the discipline at the turn of the century. It also deflects attention from the uneasy "rite of passage" of these nude female figures from their standing as ritual icons and historical antiquities to their new status of "works of art." The securing of such a status involved various reinventions of meaning —

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particularly a process of discrete submerging of the sexual body within layers of religious symbolism and aesthetic value.

## From Looking Away to Looking Closely

The celebration of the sexualised female form in Indian art comes to us as a part of a relatively recent and contested history. It may be useful to dwell a bit on the "recentness" of this history, and on some of the main turning points in its course. For it hones our awareness of how sites and objects that belong to distant pasts become meaningful and effective "in the present" — and how it is the new institutional and disciplinary tools of Art History which make for the intractable modernity of their existence. In the Indian context, we find, there was frequently a large time lag between the first "archaeological" survey and classification of monuments in the mid and late nineteenth century, and their re-configuration within a new vortex of concerns (about form, style and iconography) that could be called "art historical." The arrival of Art History as a separate field in early twentieth-century India was marked by the prioritisation of a new "aesthetic" gaze — this is what gave the discipline its new national identity, allowing it to wrest objects from the colonial archaeological establishment for a new appraisal of the "Indian-ness" of their style and content.[32] This is how, over time, "sculpture" as a distinct Indian artistic genre came to be separated out of the larger architectural complexes of which they were a part, for study, collection and display. The explicitly erotic content of much of these temple sculptures can be seen to have further delayed and complicated the process of their insertion in Art History. What arrested the eye as openly sensual proved the most difficult to accommodate within art historical discourse and the conception of nation's art tradition. This becomes patently evident in the case of sites like Khajuraho or Konark, with an abundance of such sculptures. While these abandoned temples come to be first surveyed, documented and described by British officers and scholars in the nineteenth century,[33] their emergence as national art heritage sites are much later, post-independence, developments. While the monuments soon found their place within a stylistic sequence of Indian architectural history or within the cosmology of the Hindu temple,[34] it is the sculptures (and particularly the erotic content of these) which long resisted the scrutiny of art and architectural historians.

We could take the instance of James Fergusson's pioneering architectural survey of Indian monuments that culminated in his first authoritative compendium on the subject, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876). We see him delving here into the architectural designs of these great temples — positioning the Liṅgarāja temple at Bhuvaneswar, the Sun temple at Konark, and the temples of Khajuraho at the peak of the evolution of North Indian temple styles — with only a passing word of regret about the "obscenities that disfigure a part of . . . [the] sculptures" on the temples.[35] Captain T.S. Burt, to whom goes the credit of the first "rediscovery" of the temples of Khajuraho in the jungled terrain of central India in the 1830s and the first extensive report of the site, was as shocked, it seems, by the "indecent" sculptures that stared out at him from some of these

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structures — and equally perturbed (I must add) by the joyous and animated response to these of his native palanquin bearers.[36] While moral disgust continued to block the vision of archaeologists visiting these sites,[37] it is soon replaced in scholarship by a more carefully construed screen of omission and silence — as we find in the first comprehensive survey of all ruined and standing temples at Khajuraho made by Alexander Cunningham (the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India) in the 1870s and 1880s. Such discrete strategies of turning a blind eye take on more elaborate forms in a new corpus of writing on Indian art and aesthetics that evolved over the first decades of the twentieth century. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's path-breaking volume on the *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927) provides a telling example, where he systematically extols the evolution of all the main dynastic and regional schools of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture, from the earliest to the medieval specimens, largely sidestepping the large corpus of nude and sensual female figures of some these schools of sculpture.[38]

Much of this art historical evasion had to do with the terms on which Indian sculpture and painting came into their own over the turn of the century, and found their special niche within a world artistic map. Art History in modern India was forged out of a long polemical battle against Eurocentric biases and misconceptions that pervaded the field. It involved, first and foremost, a fight for the very status of "art" for the objects that belonged to the field, an upgrading of their identities from the "decorative" to the "fine arts." It called also for the replacement of the earlier dry "archaeological" approach (that was seen to merely document and classify) by a new "artistic" evaluation of the each of the three-fold categories of architecture, sculpture and painting. Since the concept of "art" was itself a bequest of modern western episteme, it was only through a selective rejection of its European referents that the concept could become effectively nationalized. Therefore, it was not enough for Indian art to be accorded a "fine arts" pedigree on par with the west; it also had to be empowered by an aesthetic content that was distinctly separate from that of western art and unique to itself.[39] Central to this project were the inversion of hierarchies and the orchestration of difference. The battle lines came to drawn along a sharp East-West dichotomy in aesthetics — along a construed opposition between western "realism" and "Indian" idealism, between the European Hellenic and Renaissance conventions of "objective" representation, and the Indian mode of "ideal" and "symbolic" perception. From then on, the "spiritual" and the "transcendental" became (as it still remains) the defining mark of India's art and aesthetic heritage — the code that could reduce and compress its complex history around a common essence.

It is largely within this paradigm that the new subject of "sculpture" comes to life within this newly nationalized and anesthetized field of Indian Art History, since the 1920s — soon to be singled out as the exemplary form of the "masterpiece" in Indian art, and soon to become the chosen theme of a new set art historical studies.[40] Alongside, sculpture also began to mark out its special identity in the archaeological galleries of several museums, from the central body of the Indian Museum to its several provincial counterparts that now came up at Patna, Sarnath or Mathura.[41]

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Whether viewed within whole structural complexes or as abstracted self-contained pieces in museum settings, we see sculpture being reimagined as an entirely new historical and aesthetic entity. As a historical entity, it was made to represent all the main chronological phases and dynastic and regional genres of Indian art; and as an art form, it was accorded a series of stylistic attributes — like monumental form, polished stone texture, vigorous execution, rhythmic contours, sensuous plasticity or spiritual poise — with each of these attributes identifying a particular period and school. Between the 1920s and 1940s (a crucial formative phase in the disciplinary formation of Indian Art History), sculpture offered a main arena for the maturing of the two predominant analytical concerns of the discipline: the concerns with iconography (i.e., with the subject-matter of sculpture) and the concerns with style (i.e., with the formal quality of sculpture).[42] In a new prestigious line of scholarship, running from Ananda Coomaraswamy to writers like Stella Kramrisch, V.S. Agrawal or C. Sivaramamurti,[43] it is 'style' which comes to be enshrined as a key art historical category in India — the main tool for the dating and periodisation of sculpture, also for probing the deep "inner meanings" of forms and motifs.

The large corpus of sensuous imagery that spanned different phases and schools of sculpture in India could not but enter this expanding discursive field. As they were drawn into the fold, they were subjected to the careful investigations of both "iconography" and "style," with each of these serving to position them within a chain of religious symbolism and artistic evolution. Yet, we find the exposed ample bodies of the female figures continually rupturing the frames of scholarly interpretation. Dismissed by the first western experts in the field as "debased" or "grossly indecent," these female figures long inhabited a nether zone of voyeurism and disavowal, where scholars both looked and pointedly looked away. Later, as they began to look more and more closely, they had to bring to these figures the consciously desexualised and disinterested gaze of Art History — a gaze that would contain the threat of their bodies, and allow their nudity to be covered by a veil of ritual meaning and spiritual symbolism.[44] One of the main problems lay in the way the display of female bodies tended to closely converge with the eroticism of postures and acts, causing an inevitable slide from the voluptuous female figure to the sexually explicit statuary on the temples of Khajuraho or Konark. A key task of early scholarship was to resist this conflation, to separate out the feminine figures from the specific representations of *mithuna* and *maithuna* couples (i.e., couples engaged in various stages of lovemaking), and to situate these within their own circuit of ritual and literary references.

Over different periods and genres, the voluptuous feminine body in sculpture came to be endowed with a variety of meanings. They came to be read as symbols of growth, bounty and fertility, as embodiment of a divine maternal spirit, or as classical literary ideals.[45] In the process, the sexual form could move from its initial primeval association with nature and fertility rites to its later more complex divine and aesthetic connotations. This is how art historians drew the evolutionary line from the statuesque *yakṣī* figures of the early schools of sculpture of Bharhut, Sanchi or Mathura to

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the robust full-breasted figures of Hindu goddesses of subsequent years to the seductive celestial beauties that filled the walls of medieval Hindu temples. (*Pls.* 111, 112 & 113) The iconographic classifications found reinforcement in a complementary stylistic sequence. In Stella Kramrisch's classic survey of *Indian Sculpture* (1933), we see the feminine figure mapping the shifts from the earthy monumental bulk of early Indian sculpture to the superhuman strength and amplitude of "Classical Sculpture" (which she dates from roughly the fourth to the eighth centuries) to the ornate and sinuous grace of "medieval temple sculpture" (which she dates between the ninth and thirteenth centuries).[46] Central to this progression was what Kramrisch conceptualized as the "plastic transformation" and "transubstantiation" of the human body into the "subtle body" of Indian sculpture.[47] Sexuality thus comes to be rendered into no more than a veneer; an "outer" vehicle of "inner" meanings, an external guise for the hidden "spiritual physiognomy" of the sculpted figure.

**Forging a New Canon**

By the 1930s and 1940s, this growing interest in the symbolism and stylistics of the large body of female images would place the "feminine ideal" at the foreground of the Indian artistic canon. This brought with it a series of subtle shifts within the discipline — it dismantled the earlier paradigm of decline and regression in Indian art; side by side with the simplicity and purity of "ancient" Buddhist art, it placed an equal premium on the iconographic, ornamental and erotic excesses of India's "medieval" school of sculpture; most important of all, it inscribed the "sensual" as an innate attribute of the Indian art tradition. While images of the meditating Buddha held their pride of place as the reigning motif of Indian art — as the highest embodiments of Indian spirituality — they had to be brought face to face with an alternative corpus of divine and non-divine female figures whose charms were overtly physical, but whose physicality needed new forms of "spiritual" encoding. Such female figures now served as the crucial link between these twin axes of the "sublime" and "sensual" in Indian art. While the sensual figure found its divine legitimacy in a pantheon of goddesses, it also marked out a vast array of "semi-divine" figures — ranging from the *yakṣīs*, *vṛkṣas*, or *śālabhañjikās* on the railings of Buddhist *stūpas* to the *apsaras*, *nāginīs* or *kinnarīs* on the walls of temples. It is this category of semi-divine figures, which were found to most effectively blend sexual appeal with ritual significance, bridging the path between the celestial and the earthly.[48]

As I mentioned earlier, several layers of meaning now accrued around the sensuality of the female figures in Indian sculpture. The encounter with the large numbers of *yakṣī* figures of Bharhut, Sanchi or Mathura produced one dominant cognitive frame, which linked the sexual female body with the vegetal motifs of fertilization, flowering and reproduction. This analogy of the woman's body with nature soon became a key iconographic theme: studies on Indian sculpture pointed to the recurrent motifs of "women and tree" configurations, associated with the *dohada* rite described in Sanskrit literature, where a tree could be made to blossom even out of season at the touch of a young and beautiful woman.[49] Such sexually charged symbolism was ensconced in metaphors of the

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ripeness and fullness of the female body. On the one hand, we find this symbolism suggestively transplanted on to various images of goddesses, where heavy breasts showering milk function as signs of plenitude and maternal nurture. On the other hand, we also see this iconographic requirement of full breasts and large hips becoming closely intertwined with a classical literary and aesthetic criteria of feminine beauty, where the sensuousness of the visual form is played off against a rich stock of erotic literary descriptions in Sanskrit texts — and where we find writings on Indian sculpture indulging in long voyeuristic descriptions of the voluptuous female body, textually reproducing the erotic charge of the seen image.[50]

The primacy of the sensuous feminine form is most clearly outlined in a landmark exhibition of the "masterpieces of Indian art" that opened in the Government House in New Delhi in 1948, to mark the occasion of independence. It is in the ceremonial space of such a display that sculpture acquired its unique prominence as the prime category of ancient and medieval Indian art. And it is in such a historical moment and venue, that the large repertoire of erotic female figures in India's sculptural traditions, emerged to a new visibility and attention, and found themselves fully incorporated into the nation's artistic canon.[51] This is where viewers encountered the full iconographic range and stylistic variety of such figures — the famous *yakṣī* figures from Didarganj, Sanchi and Bharhut, the railing pillar sculptures of lascivious nudes from Mathura, images of the Devī in a host of incarnations and regional genres, the bronze figurines from the Coḷa period, and not least of all, the erotically posed figures from the medieval temple clusters of Orissa or Khajuraho. This is also when the temporary display powerfully perpetuated itself through a canon of photographic images. The 1948 exhibition and its accompanying album confronts us, for the first time, with the power and effects of the photographic reproduction of sculptures, where we see the enlarged and angled frame playing up the swelling contours and mannered postures of the female figures, rendering them into the most iconic images of Indian art.[52] Through the 1950s and 1960s, we also see the continuous proliferation of such images across all books, compendiums and illustrated folios on Indian art. The visual canon comes to be defined by the all-pervasive presence of these images, by their powers of ready replication, by their ability to crop up everywhere leaving the originals for exclusive viewing in museums or sites.

From here it is a short step to the final, most definitive "moment of arrival" of eroticism in Indian Art History, that presents itself in the 1960s and 1970s. It is interesting to see how the period marks itself out in various writings of the time as the long-awaited moment of liberation in the discipline — which eventually dispelled the shrouds of ignorance and shame and brought to the large body of sensual/sexual images the true appreciation of scholars and connoisseurs. As I have noted earlier, such a stance would be couched in a rhetorical move to "Indianize" the nude, and with it the larger corpus of erotic themes and motifs in Indian art. If prudishness and repugnance about sex was derided as a product of India's western past, the "erotic" was shored up as a unique and integral feature of Hindu religion and aesthetics.[53] The specific content and nature of eroticism

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would be located as much in the particular conventions of feminine beauty in Indian art, as in the complex philosophical symbolism that underlay the sexual depictions on temple walls. One recurrent concern, for instance, was to differentiate the form and nature of female nudity in Indian art from those in the western tradition. This in turn provided the central plank for asserting the age-old "sensual"/'spiritual' distinction within the nude — for transferring the burden of the "physical" and "realistic" on to the nude of western art, while retaining for the Indian artists the prerogative of "idealized" and stylized conception. Early nationalist scholars of Indian art would be at pains to show how the bare bodies of women in Indian art remained discretely covered by the layers of emotion and feeling (*bhāva*), and how the bodily proportions of these figures signified the wholly different canons of 'the Indian artistic anatomy'.[54] Such positions continued to surface in later writing — the main point in raking up the East-West, nudity-nakedness contrast was to position the female body in Indian art as never "fully" or "merely" nude. The feminine figure, in all her nudity and seductive charm, could thus be marked as a uniquely "Indian" and "aesthetic" object — singled out for attention, she was also reintegrated within the broader bewildering variety of sexual representations that surrounded her.

We can see these processes unfolding in the different genres of books that were generated during these years, and in the kinds of analytical frames in which they enclosed the subject. One prominent genre of publications were those which gave themselves entirely to the theme of *Woman in Indian Art* or *Masterpieces of the Female Form in Indian Art*, and indulged in an unashamed play of visual and textual voyeurism around its chosen selection of images.[55] In another genre of writing, we see a new obsessive preoccupation with the site of Khajuraho — with its panorama of sensual feminine figures and its concentration of tender and extreme sexual representations — producing around both an elaborate structure of explanation. In yet another genre, the theme of the "erotic" moves well beyond the confines of Khajuraho to be invoked across various forms, periods and regions of India's artistic productions — to be defined as a central constitutive feature of Indian aesthetics and a predominant genre of India's medieval temple sculpture. *Kāma-kalā* (the art of 'love, sensuality and sex') or *mithuna* (the multiple configurations of "the male-female symbol in Indian art and thought") emerge as subjects of whole books, where the motifs in Indian sculpture supply the prime illustrative material.[56] And select exhibitions of Indian sculpture organized in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s would be designed around themes like *The Sensuous Immortals* or *Gods, Guardians and Lovers*.[57] All along, what we confront is a dual process of a strategic orchestration and obfuscation of the theme of sexuality in Indian art. Selling the "exotic nudes" and the "archaic erotica" on the walls of Indian temples to a national and international public goes hand in hand with a continuous reminder of the hidden fund of spiritual and sublime meanings that these images encode.

**Between the Sexual and the Sublime**

In this last section, let me return the focus to the erotic art of Khajuraho and concentrate on the some

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main representational and imaging devices that were deployed since the 1960s in a new crop of publications on the site. We could begin here with a landmark Marg publication of 1961, titled *Homage to Khajuraho*, authored by the art historian, Stella Kramrisch, and the well-known litterateur, Mulk Raj Anand (who was at the forefront of the rediscovery of India's erotic past). In what would become a predominant metaphor, the temples of Khajuraho came to be figured as "the triumph of sculpture over architecture," and the entire temple form came to be viewed as "a giant carving, reaching up to the heavens, with detailed embellishments of gods, goddesses, celestial beauties, humans and animals, in an intricate array of the metaphysical story of creation. . . ."[58] Of all the sculptures, it is the profusion of "celestial beauties" — women of "more than human curves and amplitude," who now acquire the designation of *surāsundarīs* — who are made central to the identity of Khajuraho.[59] In a parallel strand of art historical scholarship on the textual canons of Indian temple architecture, such figures would also be classified by terms like *alasa-kanyās* (translated loosely as "Indolent Maidens"), as women who idled away time in various playful, suggestive and seductive postures. The discovery and study of a medieval Orissan Sanskrit text on temple architecture, the *Śilpa Prakāśa*, helped identify sixteen different types of these female figures, each of which had a name according to the specific mood, gestures or act she conveyed.[60] In the process, not only did the sensuality of their bodies and poses find a classical textual underpinning; the very presence of such figures (and the choice of their precise locations) on the temple walls came to be recognized as indispensable to the overall ornamental and symbolic scheme of the buildings.

For Mulk Raj Anand, the beauty and eroticism of these figures was a sure sign of the joyousness and abundance of life in the Candellā kingdom where these temples were constructed — just as the various friezes of sexual acts were a reflection of "the warm sensuality of an age, which knew the quick of the sun and warmth of human desire. . . ."[61] Yet, human desire was really what had to be contained and controlled, as he as a male scholar took on the charge of looking beyond the sexual appeal of these figures to uncover the transcendental values they embodied.[62] So, he explains to us —

> If . . . she looks into a mirror, does it not show her powers of absorption in her own being . . . by which the enchantress, self-enchanted, makes the titans forget their egoity (sic). And, again, if she is taking the thorn out of her foot, with the innocence of a peasant girl is she not extracting pain out of the flesh and taking the body towards divine grace. Even if she stands shyly with her hand shading her eyes, . . . or is putting on the ghungroo (anklets) before the dance, she is a celestial beauty, one of the lovely women of the Gods . . . mentioned by Raja Bhoja in his treatise on architecture. . . .[63]

What was true of these female seductresses was seen to equally true of the depictions of the many *mithuna* and *maithuna* couples that filled the temple walls. When she first turned to the sculptures of Khajuraho in the 1930s, Kramrisch was taken up only by the line, rhythm and movement that

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alternatively bound and released them from the wall surfaces.[64] Three decades later, she would more directly confront the erotic content of these sculptures and absorb them within the cosmic symbolism of structures, which she described as "the house and body of the gods." The figures and carvings, like stones from which they were wrought, were invoked as *prakṛti* (i.e., nature or substance "imbued and pervaded by the Essence") — and the entire sculptural scheme of the temples was analyzed in terms of the union of *prakṛti* (the walls and sculptures) with *puruṣa* (the godhead who dwells in the temple which is his body and his house).[65] Like the "female attractions" stationed on the temple walls, the scenes of sex were seen to perform a two-fold function — they were meant to first win the complete concentration of the devotee, and then test his devotion by saturating and purging him of desire. Such figures became symbols of the "concrete rites in which the human eros is mastered as a means of obtaining spiritual bliss."[66]

Such "spiritual" angles of interpretation would establish their clear sway over the erotic art of Khajuraho, as the sexual came to be thickly entangled in a web of canonical and metaphysical meanings. Meanwhile, throughout these decades, the enigma of these sculptures would remain the cause for a continuous flow of explanations. There were speculations that these sexual friezes were intended to function as "grotesques" to ward off evil spirits and protect the temple — or that there were meant to test the integrity of the devotees and serve the cathartic role of enabling them to exhaust their base mortal passions before entering the temple.[67] A common concern was to emphasise how such sculptures must have been "natural" and easily acceptable in their own times, given the uncensored celebration of love and sex in life in various textual treatises and manuals that freely circulated. The sculptures of Khajuraho were seen to visually illustrate the art of lovemaking and the various love poses detailed in the most famous and ancient of these manuals, the *Kāmasūtra* by Vatsyāyan.[68] There are clearly very different chronologies that separate a fifth century text like *Kāmasūtra* from the eleventh-century sculptures of Khajuraho — just as there are also different patterns and time-frames to the "modern" reinvented lives of these entities, in the way they are taken up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[69] Nonetheless, the two — Khajuraho and the *Kāmasūtra* — now come to be increasingly linked in the nations and in the world's historical imagination, jointly signifying a unique fund of ancient Indian erotica.

Simultaneously, in the 1970s, the "erotic" finds a new socio-cultural, "materialist" configuration, in an earlier pioneering study of Devangana Desai; one of the two women authors whose recent interpretations of Khajuraho have been marked out as critical to our current understanding of the site and its objects. Devangana Desai's main objective was to extract this vexed theme of sexual depictions from philosophising and mystification and situate it within a spectrum of the "material cultures" of the period when and for which they was produced.[70] She opted, on the one hand, for what she termed a documentary and "empirical" approach — enumerating and periodizing the different kinds and categories of erotic sculptures as they are to be found in different temple locations in a period stretching from roughly AD 500 to 1400. The erotic art of Khajuraho was thus seen not as

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an exception but as a part of a long and complex lineage of such representations. At the same time, she brought to her material the interests and tools of anthropology, using as her model a classic work such as James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, to tease out of these sculptures the secrets of the faiths and rituals of the people of those ages. The study laid out two explanatory factors — the magico-religious powers and potency of sex in early Indian religious rites, merging with the later secularization and sensualization of the theme of sex in art and literature in the medieval period.[71] This is what accounted for the subtle transition of the imagery from the ritual to the more playful and pleasurable aspects of sex. Already in the 1950s, we see scholars positing a direct link between the sexual friezes of the Khajuraho temples and medieval Tāntric practices and philosophies, particularly with the practices of two sects (Kaulas and Kāpālikas) who flourished in that region in this period, for whom sexual orgies played a pivotal role in the passage to spiritual salvation.[72] Devangana Desai, however, later questioned the validity of such associations with extreme Tāntric practices, pointing out that the nude monks in the erotic scenes have been identified by other scholars with some Digambara sects rather than the Tāntric Kāpālikas, also arguing that Khajuraho represented a stage in Indian religious history when orthodox Brahminical forces began to reassert themselves against many such extremist Tāntric rites.[73] Her main point was to move beyond such literal interpretation of the sexual motifs and emphasise, rather, the more complex symbolic analogies between the meaning of such sculptures and the textual imagery that prevailed in the religious vocabulary of the times. The Khajuraho sculptures, she showed, abounded in the visual play with such linguistic puns and metaphors. The placement of many of these specific orgiastic motifs within particular niches and junctures of the temple walls was read in terms of the coded language employed by the Tantras — as *sandhyā bhāṣā* (or visual puns and double entendres) — which corresponded to the *sandhi-kṣetra* (or points of junctures) of the different parts of the temple structure; while the design of certain extreme sexual poses was explained as clear transpositions of the Tāntric *kāma-kalā yantra* symbol.[74] In this way, we find, the sexual imagery comes to be seen, sometimes, as representations of the "real," referring to the supposedly real Tāntric ascetics who performed such acts in a different age and time; while, at other times, it is reconfirmed in its status as "representation," belonging primarily to the realm of the coded and the symbolic.

In the proliferating field of scholarship on Khajuraho and on erotic art, in general, Devangana Desai's would become the most authoritative voice. We can see the authority of her interpretations now spilling over into the more popular tourist literature, and even into the narratives spouted by the more "informed" guides, who cite the concepts of *sandhyā-bhāṣā* and Tāntric sexual rites with the same ease with they quote excerpts from Alex Comfort's best-selling book of the 1960s, called the *Joys of Sex*. A similar importance and publicity has also converged on another new landmark study of Khajuraho by the second of these woman scholars, Shobita Punja. Here, too, a range of interdisciplinary approaches — drawn from art and architectural history, epigraphy, textual scholarship and cultural anthropology — are brought together to show how myth, literature and living rituals "translate" into the sculptural art of Khajuraho.[75] The novelty of this work lies in the way it moves from the

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world of religious texts and their iconographic references to the world of popular worship and rituals which continue to be practised in one of the temple sites, transferring from one to the other the theme of desire and devotion. The author discovers her main "key" to the meaning of the erotic sculptures of Khajuraho in the legend of the divine marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī and its consummation — as narrated in a text like the *Śiva Purāṇa*, and as still enacted in the *Mahāśivarātri* rituals every year in the Matańgeśvara temple.[76] All the sexual postures and acts come to be drawn into this all-encompassing metaphor of divine love and union. And all the voluptuous women on the temple walls are imagined as self-absorbed in their various moods and poses, till they all turn around to watch the grand wedding procession pass and are riveted by the sight of Śiva, "the Original Bridegroom."[77]

Such readings, richly evocative as they are, have met with the pointed scepticism and mistrust of other scholars, especially of Devangana Desai.[78] The details of these differences need not concern us here — what I would like to emphasise is the way all these varying interpretations hinge around the need to mediate and interpolate the visual charge of these images with the languages of myth, literature, philosophy and religion. The pleasures and desires of the eye are tamed by the compulsion to explain and understand — and the erotic objects, in all their visibility, get wrapped in a growing density of interpretation. But this process is never complete or final — there is always a spill from the "scholarly" to the "salacious," from the subject of "art" and "religion" to that of "sex." That even a book like Punja's, in its avowed attempt at "new ways of looking" at Khajuraho, should chose a cliched title like *Divine Ecstasy* is telling, to say the least. That this book found its follow-up in a glossy guide-book on Khajuraho by the same author, where the same interpretations are simplified and capsuled, show the extent to which the "academic" and "popular" have blended in the current packaging of this heritage of erotic art.[79] At the same time, the world of Art History and iconography has also reasserted its boundaries and its exclusive claims — most overtly, in recent times, in a bid to reclaim the primary religious and cosmic symbolism of the architecture and sculpture of Khajuraho. It is clearest in the manner in which a scholar like Devangana Desai has stepped out the field that was once hers — distancing herself from what she now sees as the over-emphasised and sensationalised domain of erotic art, to write her latest book addressed purely to *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*. Such a book, as a recent review tells us,

> demolishes the myth generated by popular views that the Khajuraho temples are synonymous with erotica . . . [and] impel the reader to view the temple complex . . . with fresh eyes — as a microcosmic model of the cosmos where id, ego and the transcendental self merge and mingle to form a whole.[80]

Khajuraho thus remains caught in a ceaseless spiral, where the "sexual" reigns but where it must present itself in the ever new guise of the "transcendental." We could argue that, while such a site provides Indian art history with its central definition of "erotic art," the objects it presents and circulates can never be fully contained within that definition.

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Let me conclude by invoking Lynda Nead's perceptive formulation of the very concept of the "erotic" in art —

> The erotic represents aestheticised sexual representation; it marks out the limit of the sexual within legitimate culture. 'Erotic art' is the term that defines the degree of sexuality that is permissible with the category of the aesthetic . . . . [Yet] it is often at the very edge of categories where the work of definition takes place most energetically and where meaning is anchored most forcefully.[81]

The female nude of European art is shown to remain both at the centre and at the margins of these boundaries, where, despite the long history of its consecration in Renaissance and Enlightenment aesthetics, the artistic image continually "risks losing its respectability and spilling out and over into the pornographic." The sexual objects of Indian art, I would argue, remain even more fraught with this risk. For all the elaborate process of their translation into "art" and "iconography" — of the successful "transformation of matter into form" — there is always a sexual residue that lingers and threatens. This becomes patently clear in the case of the voluptuous nudes and copulating couples of the Khajuraho temples. And it becomes still more starkly evident in the allegations of "obscenity" and "violation" that could be so effectively orchestrated around the nude goddesses of M.F. Husain.

The issue of the "authenticity" of our artistic nudes, then, remains as contested as ever. The resolutions of Art History, powerful as they have been, clearly trod uncertain grounds, the moment they leave the secure confines of the world of art and scholarship and are left to contend with a wider public sphere. The lines between that, which morally repels, that which arouses, and that which can be made an object of a pure artistic gaze, become impossible to fix. How and when a particular genre of images acquire or shed connotations of immorality devolve largely around what is being defined and programmatized as "artistic" and "Indian". In today's India, such definitions, we know, are sharply split, not only across the political divide but also equally across different social and public cultures. Husain's Sarasvatī and Sītā, like the *surāsundarīs* and *maithuna* couples of Khajuraho, may have well established their status as "pure art." But they also stand, like *sandhya-bhāṣā*, dangerously at the edge of that very category of "art" — and of the boundary lines that keep apart the "erotic" from the "obscene," the "aesthetic" from the "pornographic". This becomes evident as we encounter the continued proliferation and exaggeration of the sexual imagery of Khajuraho across a range of popular public forums: in corporate offices, hotel lobbies, tourist posters, wall hangings, souvenirs and postcards. Or, as we move from the paintings of Husain to the self-indulgent voyeurism and erotic excesses that inundate his celluloid representations of Madhuri in his flamboyant cinematic product, *Gaja-Gamini*. In both cases, sexual allure and titillation find authentication in the name of tradition: in the name of medieval temple iconography or of the classical ideal of feminine beauty. Yet, the 'sexual' is also what made mediates the passage and blurs the boundaries between mass consumption and elite connoisseurship in the public reception of these images. Battling with

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the difficulties that the nude presented to the artistic gaze, Sir Kenneth Clark (the author of the canonical book, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art*) had to admit that ultimately "sexual instincts cannot (and possibly should not) be displaced in the creation and contemplation of the nude." As Lynda Nead argues, this greatest champion of the artistic nude leaves us, in the end, with "a kind of chemical compound in which the "erotic" . . . is left bubbling away but in constant danger of boiling over."[82] In doing so, he sums up for us, too, the quandary of the "erotic" feminine image as we confront in both our past and the present, in the exclusive spheres of "art" and in the more unbounded spheres of our public visual cultures.

## Notes and References

1. This paper was first conceived of and presented during my tenure as a Visiting Fellow at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles in the fall of 1999. Different versions of it were subsequently presented at a conference at the Department of Art History in Baroda in 2000 and at an Indo-French conference titled ' The Politics of Authenticity: The Visual Arts in Contemporary India' which I co-convened in Paris in 2001. I am grateful to colleagues and friends at all these conferences for their feedback on this paper. The material here has also now been reworked into a chapter of my forthcoming book, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi.
2. The theoretical framework for this paper has evolved out of some critical new writing on the subject of the female nude in western art history. I have drawn, in particular, on the following books and articles — Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992; Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting, 1803-1908*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990; Carol Duncan, 'The Esthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art', in *Heresies*, vol. I, 1977.
3. While some of the oldest temple remains of the sites (like the ruined fragments of the Causaṭh Yoginī temple) date back beyond the tenth century, the evidence of inscriptions have led scholars to periodise most of the largest temples (such as the Lakṣmaṇa temple, with an inscription dated AD 954, and the Viśvanātha temple, with an inscription dated AD 1002) as monuments whose lives coincide with the whole of this last millennium. These dates for Khajuraho seems to have been established by a scholar like James Fergusson in the nineteenth century in his pioneering survey, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, vol. II, rev. 2nd edn. John Murray, London 1910, rpt., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1972. With minor variations, these same dates are confirmed in later studies — such as the landmark Marg volume, *Homage to Khajuraho* by Mulk Raj Anand and Stella Kramrisch (Marg, Bombay, Publications, 1961) or the authorised Archaeological Survey monograph on *Khajuraho* by Krishna Deva (ASI, New Delhi, 6th edn., 1980).
4. On the Khajuraho Millennium celebrations, see for instance the features by Nandita Roy, 'Celebrating Passion' in *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 29 July 1998; or by S. Kalidas, on 'Heritage: Khajuraho - Beyond the Erotic' in *India Today*, 15 March 1999.
5. To cite some of the latest in this line of specialised researches, we have Devangana Desai and Phanikanta Mishra's expositions on some newly-discovered temple remains on the site — 'New Discoveries — I. Exposition of the Bijamandala Temple in Khajuraho; II. Significance of the new find at Khajuraho: Gahapati Kokkala'a Vaidyanatha Temple', *Marg*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2000 — or Devangana Desai's currently ongoing survey of the 'disappeared temples' of Khajuraho and the dispersal of Khajuraho sculptures in museums all over the country — 'How the Khajuraho Apsaras came to the Asiatic Society', forthcoming, *Lalit Kala*, 2002.
6. What is interesting is the way the scholarly publications continuously beget a spate of the more glossy

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books and tourist guides — thus, for instance, Krishna Deva's Archaeological Survey monograph on *Khajuraho* (ASI, New Delhi, 6th edn., 1980) goes hand in hand with his more sumptuously illustrated coffee-table book, written 'in a lucid style for the lay reader and the tourist . . .' *Khajuraho*, Brijbasi, New Delhi, 1986; and Shobita Punja follows up her major book, *Divine Ecstasy: The Story of Khajuraho*, Viking, New Delhi, 1992 with a tourist guide, *Khajuraho and its Environs* (New Delhi: 1998), which summarises the same theory and narrative about the temples, and which has today effectively displaced her earlier work (no longer in print) in all bookshops.

7. Since the 1970s, the Khajuraho sculptures have been one of the most photographed subjects in the field of the Indian art and in the growing tourism and heritage industry. In scale, detail and lavishness of the photographs, however, none of the publications still surpass the landmark volume by Eliky Zannas and J, Auboyer, *Khajuraho*, Mouton & Co., Hague, 1960 — the work from which I have selected the majority of my illustrations.

8. See, for instance, Shobita Punja, *Divine Ecstasy: The Story of Khajuraho*, or especially Devangana Desai's new book, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, Project for Indian Cultural Studies, Publication IV, Mumbai, 1996.

9. We are asked not to be so wrapped up in the erotic friezes so as to lose 'a holistic view of the site', so as not to take stock of the predominant body of religious imagery that fill the temple walls, and so as not to be able to see the sexual depictions as a part of this larger religious iconography, where the physical union of man and woman stood to signify a deeper spiritual and cosmic union. The point is most emphatically presented in the feature in *India Today*, 15 March 1999, pp. 66-70, which carries the title, 'Beyond the Erotic'.

10. The term is used, not merely in the context of the rediscovery of Khajuraho, but also more generally in the context of a new voyeuristic celebration of the feminine image in Indian art — as in Rustam J. Mehta, *Masterpieces of the Female Form in Indian Art*, D.B. Tapaporevala, Bombay, 1972.

11. See, especially, Mulk Raj Anand, *Kāma-Kalā: Some Notes on the Philosophical Basis of Hindu Erotic Sculpture*, Nagel Publishers, New York, London, Geneva, Paris, 1960, pp. 5-8.

12. Contrary to popular impressions, the term *mithuna*, it has been explained, signifies only a romantic and amorous couple, as is typified, for instance, by the repeated images of the divine couple of Śiva and Pārvatī on the Khajuraho temples — while the term, *maithuna*, refers specifically to the depiction of acts of copulation and sexual intercourse.

13. This is the main theory expounded by Shobita Punja throughout her book, *Divine Ecstasy*.

14. This explanation, first elaborated by Stella Kramrisch is her essay; 'Reflection on the House and Body of the Gods' (*Homage to Khajuraho*, p. 8) is also the main theme in the later accounts of Krishna Deva, *Khajuraho*, Brijbasi, New Delhi, 1986, p. 205.

15. This, for instance, was the description used for the Khajuraho temples in the mega multi-part CNN documentary on the millennium. The documentary chronologically took up a century at a time, featuring different histories of world civilizations in that century. In the episode on India, covering the eleventh century (broadcast on Sunday, 10 October 1999), the documentary zeroed in on two classical Hindu sites: Vārāṇasī and Khajuraho. The story of Khajuraho was narrated in terms of the central legend of the divine nuptials of Śiva and Pārvatī — about how the divine pair made love for a thousand years, and the whole world was created out of the intensity and ecstasy of this union.

16. The two woman scholars being referred to are Shobita Punja and Devangana Desai, whose two recent scholarly monographs on Khajuraho were published in the 1990s — 'Beyond the Erotic', *India Today*, 15 March 1999, pp. 66-67.

17. The number of books written on M.F. Husain has been in proportion to the celebrity status of this

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central persona of modern Indian art. I have drawn mainly on the chapter on Husain in Geeta Kapur's *Contemporary Indian Painters*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1973 and the book by Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni, *Husain: Riding the Lightning*, Popular Prakasan, Mumbai, 1996.

18. Charges stated in the criminal case brought against M.F. Husain for his nude depictions of Hindu goddesses by the convenor of the Jamshedpur unit of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) — quoted in *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 5 October 1996.

19. The campaign was suddenly stirred up in the middle of 1996 by an article in a little-known Hindi magazine of Bhopal, *Vichar Mimansa*, titled, 'Yeh Chitrakar hai ya Kasai' (Is this an Artist or a Butcher?) Which hurled a series of accusations against Husain for painting Sarasvatī, Durgā and Gaṇeśa naked, and even showing Draupadī naked even though she was never totally disrobed. Its fury was also vented on Husain's Madhuri series of paintings, especially on the painting modelled on the 'Rape of Europa' which shows Madhuri being gored by 'McBull'.

20. Alongside several protest rallies organized by artists and intellectuals all over the country, there was also a powerful expression of solidarity for Husain in the media. One of the most comprehensive counter-attacks and defenses can be found in the cover story, 'In defense of freedom in art: Against the *Hindutva* attack on M.F. Husain', *Frontline*, Madras, 15 November 1996, pp. 4-13.

21. This theme, in recent times, has been most powerfully handled in various articles of Lynda Nead, and in her book, *The Female Nude*, which provides the most extended discussion of the 'complex inter-relationships between the domains of art and pornography through the representations of the female body' (p. 3).

22. Apart from the *Frontline* cover-story, let me cite some other newspaper articles and editorials of the time from Calcutta, which express this multiple sense of assault — 'Art Attack', *The Telegraph*, 6 October 1996; Soumitro Das, 'Art of Freedom: The What and the How', *The Statesman*, 16 October 1996.

23. Monica Juneja, 'Reclaiming the Public Sphere: Husain's portrayals of Sarasvatī and Draupadi', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 January 1997.

24. In fact, images like the 'Sarasvatī' appear entirely innocent besides Husain's much-sensationalised obsession with Madhuri, and the outrageous licenses he has taken in his imaging of Madhuri, in his paintings and later in his maiden film venture, *Gaja-Gamini*. Take for instance, a painting where Madhuri is depicted as a nude Europa being gored by 'McBull' in an overt indulgence of the artist's sexual fantasy — such a painting would serve for the Hindu fundamentalists as the clearest indication of the Muslim artist's sexual violation of a Hindu woman. Or take, even more, his unabashed erotic excesses with the clothing and posturing of Madhuri in his film, *Gaja-Gamini*, in the guise of revering her as the icon of classical Indian womanhood.

25. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Clothing the Goddess: The Modern Contest over Representations of the Devi', in Vidya Dehejia, ed., *Devi: The Great Goddess*, Smithsonian Institution, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, 1999, pp. 157-79.

26. Such a view was voiced, for instance, by scholars and administrators associated with the Jagannāth temple at Purī, and were cited in an article by Ranjona Banerji, 'Art or Blasphemy?' in *Midday*, Mumbai, 13 October 1996.

27. Husain, in his public statements at that time, directly referred to some of these Coḷa bronzes, 'where Pārvatī is sitting on Śiva's lap and he is holding her breast. It represents the cosmic union' — Referred to in Ranjona, Banerji, 'Art or Blasphemy?' *Midday*, Sunday, 13 October 1996.

28. The iconography of Lajjā-Gaurī was referred to in the defence of Husain by the eminent historian, Romila Thapar, and also by S. Settar, then Chairperson of the Indian Council of Historical Research — see, 'In Defense of Freedom in Art', *Frontline*, 15 November 1996, pp. 6, 10.

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29. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12 — Interview given by Husain from London to *Frontline*, 17 October 2000.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.
31. See, Dipankar Gupta, 'Hindu extremists thrive on the politics of intolerance', *Asia Times*, 13 November 1996.
32. I have discussed this process at length in my book, The *Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, Chapter V; and in my article, 'Instituting the Nation in Art' in Partha Chatterjee, ed., *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation State*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998.
33. The first reports of Khajuraho come from Captain T.S. Burt who stumbled on to this unknown abandoned temple site in 1838, and are followed by the more detailed surveys of Alexander Cunningham during his archaeological tours of India, first in 1852, and then again in the 1870s. The ruined temple at Konark, we know, was visited by James Fergusson in the course of his first architectural tours of India between 1839 and 1842, with a full-page sketch of the temple and a description appearing in his first book, *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture in Hindostan*, J. Murray, London, 1848.
34. From James Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* of 1876 to Stella Kramrisch's monumental work, *The Hindu Temple*, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1948, we see these temple sites being featured within an elaborate vortex of medieval Hindu architectural styles, on one hand, and a spiritual cosmology of the archetypal Hindu temple, on the other hand.
35. James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, vol. II (rpt. edn., 1972), pp. 97-106, 140-41.
36. Described in Shobita Punja, *Divine Ecstasy*, Part I, Chapter 1, pp. 3-13.
37. We have one of the most pointed expressions of such moral repulsion from Alexander Cunningham's assistant, J.D. Beglar, who travelled around the Mahobā-Khajuraho areas during the winter seasons of 1871-72 and 1873-74. Invoking the profoundly 'improving' effects of British rule on the morals of Indians, he wrote how '. . . the extent of the debt that female morality and decency owes to British rule and western ideas can only be realized by a comparison of existing customs with the representations on the holy temples, not Khajuraho alone, but of a great portion of India. . . .' — Cited by Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology, from the beginning to 1947*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 83-84.
38. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, rpt., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1972, Parts II, III, IV, pp. 15-127.
39. For a further discussion, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Instituting the Nation in Art', pp. 97-104.
40. The two earliest, most notable books on the subject were Ludwig Bachofer's, *Early Indian Sculpture*, and vols. 1 and 2, Pegasus Press, Paris, 1929, which still remain unique in the lavishness and scale of its photographic plates; and Stella Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture* (Calcutta: 1933), which still provides one of the foundational texts for students of Indian sculpture.
41. The refiguring of old archaeological collections as new "sculpture" galleries is signposted by the publication of new catalogues and guidebooks like, N.G. Majumdar's *A Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum*, Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi, 1937. On the sculptures in the new provincial and site museums at Mathura, Sārnāth and Patna, see — Daya Ram Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*, Superintendent, Government Printing, Calcutta, 1914; V.S. Agarwala, *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Curzon Museum of Archaeology, Muttra*, Superintendent, Government Printing, Allahabad, 1933; and S.A. Shere, *Guide to the Archaeological Galleries of the Patna Museum: Stone Sculptures and Terracottas*, Superintendent, Government Printing, Patna, 1946.
42. This is best analyzed in the brief but incisive historiographical survey of Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983 — "sculpture", pp. 56-

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79.

43. See, for instance, V.S. Agarwala's *Gupta Art* (Lucknow: U.P. Historical Society, 1948); *Masterpieces of Mathura Sculpture*, Prithvi Prakashan, Varanasi, 1965; *The Heritage of Indian Art*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1964 — and C. Sivaramamurti's, *Guide to the Archaeological Galleries of the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1954; *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum*, Superintendent, Government Printing, Madras, 1956; and *Indian Sculpture*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1961.

44. Such a process has been very well explored in the context of the encounter of Sinhalese scholars and national officials with the unclothed feminine figures of the Sigiriya frescoes of the island — see Malathi de Alwis, 'Sexuality in the field of vision: The discursive clothing of the Sigiriya frescoes' in Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, ed., *Embodied Violence: Communalizing Women's Sexuality in south Asia*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1996.

45. The association of the voluptuous feminine figure with fertility cults, with the vegetal metaphors of flowering and reproduction, and with the ideals of motherhood is underlined in E.B. Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, J. Murray, London, 1908 and *The Ideals of Indian Art*, J. Murray, London, 1911 — see new combined revised edition, introduced by Pramod Chandra, *The Art Heritage of India* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala, 1964), pp. 10-15, 143-149, 160-161. Later works like Heinz Mode, *The Woman in Indian Art*, McGraw Hill, New York, 1970, while alluding to these meanings, highlight more the analogies between the visual and literary descriptions of sensual feminine beauty.

46. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*.

47. This ideal of the 'subtle body' of Indian sculpture becomes the framing theme of Stella Kramrisch's subsequent major work on the subject, *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1961, pp. 28-32 ff.

48. Heinz Mode, *The Woman in Indian Art*, pp. 9-11.

49. The motif is highlighted most effectively, first, in A.K. Coomaraswamy's work on the *yakṣas*, Part I, London, 1931; Munshiram Manoharlal, rpt., New Delhi, 1971, pp.32-36; and later in Stella Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, pp. 15-16 ff.

50. Such descriptions can be seen to permeate both the new coffee-table genre of books on the theme of feminine imagery in Indian art (a classic example being Heinz Mode, The *Woman in Indian Art*) as well as the more standard art-histories and museum catalogues, as for example, Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, vol. 1, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, [LACMA], 1986.

51. See, *Exhibition of Indian Art, held at the Government House, New Delhi, 6th November to 31st December, 1948*, Ministry of Education, Dept. of Archaeology, New Delhi, 1948) — I. *Catalogue*, with an Introduction by V.S. Agarwala; II. *Album* of *Pls*.

52. Such a focus on the sensual feminine figures of Indian sculpture, evident in V.S. Agarwala's Introduction to the exhibition *Catalogue*, is borne out even more powerfully in the concentrated and enlarged space of the photographic *Album*. See, particularly, *Pls*. 2, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15 and 16.

53. Mulk Raj Anand, *Kāma-Kalā*, pp. 8-11 ff. The author's main purpose in writing this book was 'to reinstate the fundamental postulates behind Hindu erotic art, so that the sexual principles which inform some of the most vital sculptures of Bhuvaneswara, Konarak and Puri are made explicit, and the return is made towards an internal criticism in terms of the intentions of the builders, rather in terms of biased westerners, whether they are Christian missionaries or their . . . disciples among the fanatical puritans in our midst.' (p. 8)

54. Examples of such an argument abound in the art-critical and art historical writings that converged around the nationalist art movement in Bengal in the first two decades of the twentieth century — see,

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for instance, Asit Kumar Haldar's book on *Ajanta* Calcutta, 1913, pp. , Or Abanindranath Tagore's famous tract called 'Mūrti', serialised in the journal, *Prabasi*, Poush, Magh 1320 (1913), translated into English by Sukumar Ray under the title, *Some Notes on an Indian Artistic Anatomy*, Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, 1914.

55. Two best-known books in this genre to come out of this period are those by Heinz Mode, *The Woman in Indian Art* and by Rustam J. Mehta, *Masterpieces of the Female Form in Indian Art*.

56. Let me cite the case of two books here — one, Mulk Raj Anand's *Kāma-Kalā*, which can be seen in 1960 to inaugurate the period's new obsession with the nation's erotic past; and the other, Prithvi Kumar Agarwala's *Mithuna: The Male-Female Symbol in Indian Art and Thought*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1983, which rides on the peak of both the scholarly and popular celebration of erotica during the 1970s and 1980s. Both books, the first in particular, are also amply illustrated with photographs of erotic motifs from Indian temple sculpture. Mulk Raj Anand acknowledged the extent to which the appeal of his book hinged around the photographs of sculptures taken by four talented photographers, Raymond Burnier, Sunil Janah, D.H. Sahiar and Moti Ram Jain, who took up in particular the kind of sexual motifs 'which has so far evoked the wrath of puritans'. (Preface, p. 6)

57. Pratapaditya Pal, *The Sensuous Immortals: A Selection of Sculptures from the Pan-Asian Collection*, LACMA, Los Angeles, 1977 — Catalogue of the exhibition held at LACMA from 25 October 1977 to 15 January 1978; Vishaka N. Desai, ed., *Gods, Guardians and Lovers: Medieval temple Sculpture from North India*, Asia Society, New York, 198 — Catalogue of the exhibition on the theme organized at the Asia Society.

58. Mulk Raj Anand, *Homage to Khajuraho*, p. 2.

59. The term *surāsundarīs* (closest translation, 'celestial beauties') is accredited to Stella Kramrisch, and is (as far as I have come across) used for the first time by her and Mulk Raj Anand in the book, *Homage to Khajuraho*, pp. 4, 7-8. The term gains currency in a large number of the later books on Khajuraho, as for example, in Krishna Deva's two books on *Khajuraho* (1980, 1983) or in Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty's book, The *Art of Khajuraho*, Arnold Heinemann, New Delhi, India, 1985.

60. *Śilpa Prakāśa*, a Medieval Orissan Sanskrit text on temple architecture, by Ramachandra Kaulachara, translated and annotated by Alice Boner and Sadasiva Rath Sharma, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1966, pp. 46-53.

61. Mulk Raj Anand, *Homage to Khajuraho*, pp. 4-5.

62. Here, Mulk Raj Anand's engagement with the sensuous feminine figures on the Khajuraho temple walls makes a suggestive parallel with Sir Kenneth Clark's famous idealisation of the female nude of European art. In both cases, what surfaces is the male connoisseur's latent struggle to purge himself of bodily desire, de-eroticise the images he withheld and arrive at a purely disinterested contemplation of the feminine figure in art. Thus, Lynda Nead has shown how 'throughout the pages of *The Nude* [Kenneth Clark classic work on the theme], . . . another spectral body appears and disappears; not just the body in art, but Clark's own body, as it is sublimated, arrested and aroused by the objects he examines'. Lynda Nead, 'Encounters of the Obscene Kind: Art, Obscenity and the Connoisseur', in *ASCA Brief Yearbook*, 1998, pp. 26-27.

63. Mulk Raj Anand, *Homage to Khajuraho*, p. 3.

64. Stella Kramrisch, 'Chandella Sculpture: Khajuraho', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, December 1933 — Reprinted in Barbara Stroller Miller, ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1983.

65. Stella Kramrisch, 'Reflections on the House and Body of Gods', *Homage to Khajuraho*, pp. 8-10.

66. Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, pp. 18-19.

67. See, for example, Urmila Agarwal, *Khajuraho Sculptures and their Significance*, S. Chand & Co, Delhi, 1964, pp. 207-08; or Kanwar Lal, *Erotic Sculpture of Khajuraho*, Asia Press, New Delhi, 1970.

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68. Such an equation of the two now predominates all the current tourist book accounts of the Khajuraho temples and sculptures, especially all the mini *Kāmasūtra* texts on sale in the Khajuraho bookshops, where photographs of various erotically posed or copulating Khajuraho sculptures illustrate different passages from the text.
69. On the modern incarnations of the *Kāmasūtra*, see Kumkum Roy's article, 'Unraveling the Kamasutra', in Janaki Nair and Mary John, ed., *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1999.
70. Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-Cultural Study*, Tata McGraw Hill, New Delhi, 1975.
71. *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp.1-8.
72. Pramod Chandra, 'The Kaula-Kapalika Cults of Khajuraho', *Lalit Kala*, nos. 1-2, 1955-56.
73. There is a marked shift in Devangana Desai's views between her first work on the *Erotic Sculpture of India*, and her later definitive study of *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*. In the first work, Chapter VII is devoted entirely to this theme of sex in Tantrism, and discusses two aspects of Tantrism, magico-sexual and social, pointing to the way the geographical spread and proliferation of Tāntric sects and cults in these regions had a direct bearing on the sexual representations on these temple exteriors. The revised positions are more overtly stated in the latter work, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, pp. 49-53.
74. *Erotic Sculpture of India*, pp. 141-43; *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, pp. 175-97. This theory is also analyzed, with reference to Devangana Desai's work, by Shobita Punja in *Divine Ecstasy*, pp. 42-48.
75. Shobita Punja, *Divine Ecstasy*, Preface, pp. x-xii.
76. Devangana Desai goes all out to demolish this explanation on many lines. Firstly, she emphatically argues that the wide variety of such erotic sculptures, as they are to be seen not just in Khajuraho but in several other medieval Indian temples, belies the possibility that they have anything to do at all with the myth of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī. Secondly, she is also quick to point out that the current *Śivarātri* celebrations at the Matańgeśvara temple every year in March certainly don't date back to the Candellā period. This was more a mid nineteenth century phenomenon, that came up with the annual *Śivarātri* fair begun at Khajuraho by the local Chhatarpur ruler, Māharāja Pratap Singh.

    Shobita Punja, none the less, makes a persuasive case for exercising 'an intuitive historical imagination' to bridge the past and the present at Khajuraho, taking on the challenge of a historical reconstruction of the significance of the temples and the sculptures from the surviving material objects before her and from the beliefs, legends and devotional practices that continue to animate the site today (*Divine Ecstasy*, p. 189).
77. *Ibid.*, Part II : 'The Divine Marriage', pp. 65-186.
78. Devangana Desai, *op cit.*, Chapter VII, which is devoted entirely to this theme of sex in Tantrism, discusses two aspects of Tantrism, magico-sexual and social, and the ways in which the geographical spread and proliferation of Tantric sects and cults in these regions had a direct bearing on the sexual representations on these temple exteriors.
79. Shobita Punja, *Khajuraho and its Environs.*
80. Madhu Khanna, 'Decoding Khajuraho', Review of Devangana Desai, The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho, Project for Indian Cultural Studies, Mumbai, 1996 — *The Book Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 9, September 1999.
81. Lynda Nead, 'Erotic Art: A Frame for Desire', in *The Female Nude*, p. 103.
82. Lynda Nead, 'A Discourse on the Naked and the Nude', *The Female Nude*, pp. 13-14.

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# 28

# Crafting Education: Caste, Work and the Wardha Resolution of 1937

*Deeptha Achar*

In many ways, it appears as if this paper, which is really about the demand for compulsory education in India, is out of place in a book on Art History. Yet, as one traces the contours of this demand, it is possible to locate productive intersections that might offer new ways of thinking about both, the history of education as well as about the disciplinary formation of Art History in India. The historical moment that I refer to is in the 1930s, when popular aspiration for education found its way into public policy. What is particularly significant about this demand at this time is the manner in which it gets manifested in the Wardha Resolution of 1937. It is in this influential resolution on education that a new category is deployed in the national debate on schooling. This new category is craft. Clearly, the category craft in itself was not new; indeed it was a keyword in other discourses, other disciplines, implicated not least in the making of nationalist art history. What was novel, perhaps radical, was its entry, almost for the first time, into the discourse of education in India.

It will be clear by now that my exploration of the category "craft" has emerged in the context of an engagement with the history of education in India. It is in trying to understand the implication of a word that became central to the shaping of the educational policies and programmes that I found myself tracking its career across discourses that scarcely seemed connected to Indian educational history. Although craft figures in disciplines such as Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology, it is in Art History that it occupies a seminal place. Indeed, it is possible to argue that early nationalist Art History was fashioned, in part, through its sustained engagement with the notion of craft. In this paper, I propose to examine the interface between an art historical notion of craft and the manner in which this notion impinges upon the conceptualisation of mass education in India.

The paper consists of two sections: in the first section, I will examine the notion "craft" in relation to the category "art." In the second section, I attempt to open out the question of craft, to tease out the effects it may have for the conceptualization of mass education.

## I

One of the central concerns of early (nationalist) art history was to rescue the ancient Indian artefact

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from the category craft. Colonialist art historiography had constructed these objects as skillful but grotesque and formulaic, magico-religious in function, lacking in aesthetic qualities that make for art. Nor did these objects carry the signature of individual artists, neither were the objects represented true to life. These objects were classed under the rubric "tradition," as products of artisans, rather than artists. Clearly, whether these objects were classed as craft or not, they shared its defining characteristics: they were products of skill, they had a function, they were products of artisanal rather than artistic endeavour, they drew from techniques of a timeless tradition rather than an individuated artistic inspiration.[1] To that extent, they could be seen as classed alongside craft objects, with hardly any intrinsic differentiation allowed between contemporary craft objects and ancient art objects except a distance obtaining across the axis of time.

The central project of early nationalist art historiography was primarily to reconstitute these ancient artefacts, under the rubric of "art," thereby endowing the proto-nation with an aesthetic tradition. This process of transfer, as it were, was effected through a range of strategies: identification and validation of Sanskrit texts on aesthetics,[2] hunt for "signatures" of artists in what was now ancient art[3] as well as for ancient Indian equivalences for key terms in western aesthetics,[4] reconceptualization of representational practices in order to validate the aesthetics of temple sculpture[5] and not least, a re-ordering of the relationship between art and craft. Although the newly invented art object was shifted away from the sphere of craft, it was nevertheless deeply implicated in the question of craft. This was chiefly because the arguments that reconstituted this object were situated within and through a frame that was structured by a binary relationship between art and craft. While the translation of *śilpin*, as artist, and *śilpa* as art, constructs, for example, temple sculpture as art, it suppresses artisanal connotations of the words. It is the art-craft binary that problematizes the translation of *śilpa/śilpin.* Ludo Rocher notes that

> Although in Monier-Williams' English-Sanskrit dictionary, *śilpa* and *śilpin* are the first terms for "art" and 'artist' respectively, in his Sanskrit-English dictionary, *śilpa* is 'any manual art or craft, or handicraft or mechanical or fine art', and *śilpin* is 'artificer, artisan, craftsman, artist.[6]

The equation of *śilpī/śilpin* with art solely suggests, perhaps, that art and craft were imagined as distinct entities. However, early art historians were clearly aware of the problems attendant on erasing craft from the ambit of *śilpa;* Stella Kramrisch, for example, wrote, "The range of crafts extends over the entire culture and comprises the work of the wheelwright and the sculptor, or potter and perfumer, weaver and architect."[7] It is sufficient to indicate here that this widening of the scope of "art" through the incursion of what was designated "craft" in the west, was effected across the art-craft binary, instituting an ambiguous, ambivalent relationship with contemporary craft objects.

The continuing influence of such a conceptualization of ancient Indian "art" is underscored when

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the tension between art and craft is sustained in significant works as late as in the 1980s. For example, in *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman* (1988),[8] the slippage between art and craft occurs almost systematically. For instance, Ashoke Chatterjee argues that "As these artist-craftsmen created artefacts for everyday use, no separate term was needed to distinguish the plastic arts from craft"(p. 3). Again, Carol Radcliffe Bolon allows no significant separation between art and craft when she notes that "We know that ancient Indian artists were skilled members of hereditary craft organizations"(p. 52). Across these representative citations, one can observe a certain blurring of the boundary between art and craft, a blurring which, perhaps, gestures to the effectiveness with which early art historians enlarged the purview and scope of art. Yet, the uncertainty that attends the status of certain objects and their producers, the lack of fixity in their meanings also perhaps indicates a normative definition residing elsewhere. The hesitancy of meaning, partly produced through a normative eurocentric art-craft binary, has persisted through several decades of Indian art historiography. This should surely alert us to the complexity of processes working across Indian Art History through which the object of art as much as the object of craft is constituted.

The move to enlarge the scope of art by means of defining craft away from its western conceptualization certainly unsettled a fixed eurocentric binary. Nevertheless, such a move did not alter the equally eurocentric terms of reference which deemed art as hierarchically superior to craft. It is in this context, at the moment when Indian art historiography was revising the terms of the art-craft binary through an engagement with the multivalent complexities of terms such as *śilpa* and *śilpin* that Coomaraswamy wrote

> The *śilpin* was one who wears a sacred thread, a necklace of sacred beads, a ring of *kūśa* grass upon his finger: one delighting in the worship of God, faithful to his wife, avoiding strange women, true to his family, of a pure heart and virtuous, chanting the Vedas, constant in the performance of ceremonial duties, piously acquiring a knowledge of various sciences — such a one is indeed a Craftsman.[9]

Coomaraswamy clearly invokes the craft-craftsman connotation of *śilpa-śilpin* yet he sacralizes these terms in a manner that allows him to celebrate the category, transforming it into Art more surely than the Monier-Williams translation. What allows him to overturn the art-craft hierarchy is, I argue, his appeal to caste. The Brahmin contours of such an understanding of *śilpin* and, indeed, Craft need hardly be underscored. Neither needs the material location of craftspersons in non-Brahmin caste formations be stressed. Romila Thapar has argued that

> The *dharmasūtras* refer to the low status of the artisan, who is frequently associated with the *śudra*. The fact of manual labor being regarded low is made evident in the statement that a Brahman living by craft was to be treated as a *śudra*, in spite of *Jātaka* sources that refer to Brahman weavers and carpenters.[10]

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Even if one goes by the evidence of the *Jātaka* sources to affirm the existence of Brahmin craftspersons, their mean status which entailed their being "treated as a *śūdra*" testifies to the overall low value attached to manual, productive labour, whether or not that labour was defined as craft. It is here that the hierarchical values of the colonial regime and the native elite coincide; craft, according to both, was designated as of lesser value. I will conclude by suggesting that the art-craft question in nationalist art historiography was resolved, at least partly, not only by situating the newly reconstituted ancient artifact in the realm of art, but also along the axis of caste.

## II

The demand for free, compulsory primary education emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century, precisely at the time when Coomaraswamy was writing works such as *The Indian Craftsman* (1909) and the *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913). G.K. Gokhale had moved a resolution for compulsory education in 1910, which he withdrew on the assurance that the colonial government would examine the question thoroughly. He re-introduced the Bill in the Imperial Legislative Assembly, but the Bill was defeated in 1912. Curiously enough, these two events were to come together as the demand for popular education came to take a nationalist shape. The Wardha Resolution of 1937 was a moment when popular aspiration for education found its way into public policy. It is not as if the question of primary education had not been the subject of debate in colonial India; indeed, colonial education was a site of debate and discussion from its very inception. What marks the 1937 resolution as particularly significant is the fact that the popularly elected, largely Congress government in the Provincial Assemblies sought to write these aspirations into a policy and a programme.

The resolutions passed by the Conference of National Workers under the presidentship of Gandhi are succinct enough:

1. That in the opinion of this conference free and compulsory education be provided for seven years on a nationwide scale.
2. That the medium of instruction be the mother tongue.
3. That the Conference endorses the proposal, made by Mahatma Gandhi, that the process of education throughout this period should centre round some productive form of manual work, and that all other abilities to be developed or training to be given should as far as possible, be integrally related to the central handicraft chosen with due regard to the environment of the child.
4. That the Conference expects that the system of education will gradually be able to cover the remuneration of the teachers.[11]

The report of the Committee appointed by the Conference to prepare a detailed educational scheme based on these principles was presented to the Indian National Congress in the Haripura

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session of 1938. Except for the last resolution concerning the economic self-sufficiency of educational institutions, the Wardha Scheme was accepted. The concept of Basic Education, or Nai Talim, as it was called, became the guiding principle of the Provincial Assemblies, as well as the cornerstone for educational thinking in a newly independent India.

The first two resolutions are not particularly novel. In fact, compulsory education had been introduced by Sayaji Rao Gaekwad in 1906. The debate on mother tongue vs. English had been raging for the good part of the nineteenth century. Far more radical are the last two resolutions regarding work and self-sufficiency. The craft-based education proposed by Gandhi, and elaborated by the Zakir Hussain Report envisaged a mass education system organized around manual work, embodied as craft. The Report argued that

> Socially considered, the introduction of such practical productive work in education, to be participated in by all the children of the nation, will tend to breakdown the existing barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers, harmful alike for both. It will also cultivate in the only possible way a true sense of dignity of labour and of human solidarity — an ethical and moral gain of incalculable significance.[12]

Quite clearly, the Scheme is a product of Gandhi's thought.[13] It is in line with his vision of a thriving self-sufficient rural economy, and is consistent with his efforts to provide alternatives to "western" conceptual models. In many ways, his idea, bypassed in contemporary India, that mass education should be given through village crafts like spinning and weaving and not through books, that children should actually produce articles that are marketable and these should be sold to make education self-supporting went against the nationalist line.[14] He argued:

> It is my belief that a craft which immediately suggests itself for making primary schools self-sufficient is spinning and allied processes. This includes all the processes from picking cotton to weaving intricate designs into khadi. . . . While teaching the crafts, subjects like history, geography and arithmetic would be partially or wholly covered. Language and grammar as part of it, and also correct pronunciation would be naturally included.[15]

Craft, here, is a democratic principle that "breaks down existing barriers of prejudice," as also an ideal fusion of intellectual progress woven around traditional technical skill that could inculcate "true sense of dignity of labour and of human solidarity." This move to institute work at the heart of mass education was truly radical. Pedagogically, it offered an alternative to the compartmentalisation between subjects, to the separation between physical and intellectual activity in schools. Ideologically, such a move was productive at a number of levels: it countered colonialist ideas which conceived childhood as radically separate from the sphere of work. Focusing on village craft, it displaced the urban centrèdness of modern systems of education even as it privileged working

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class competencies over dominant class book learning. In fact, the *Report on Basic Education* suggests craft-based productive learning worked against the separation of life and education, work and learning, outside world and school, on which western education is structured in order to construct a holistic model of the self through which "the highest development of the mind and soul is possible."

The basic crafts proposed for study were defined as follows:

> The Basic Craft: Such reasonable skill should be attained in the handicrafts chosen, as would enable the pupil to pursue it as an occupation after finishing his full course.
>
> The following may be chosen as basic crafts in various schools:
>
> (a) Spinning and weaving
> (b) Carpentry
> (c) Agriculture
> (d) Fruit and vegetable gardening
> (e) Leather work
> (f) Any other craft for which local and geographical conditions are favourable and which satisfies the conditions mentioned above.
>
> Even where an industry other than spinning and weaving or agriculture is the basic craft, the pupils will be expected to attain a minimum knowledge of carding and spinning with the *taklī*, and a practical acquaintance of elementary agricultural work in the local area.[16]

This list offers us an insight into the manner in which the policy acquires a radical charge. A careful examination of these craft categories shows a remarkable coincidence of these categories with artisanal work performed by "lower" caste groups. This has been noted by Glyn Richards who comments that

> Gandhi was proposing something quite revolutionary when he referred to the sacramental nature of manual labour, by means of which we were identifying ourselves with the lower strata of society.[17]

Indeed, Gandhi declares,

> Your suggestion for different schools for different classes — weavers, spinners, carpenters and so on — would not answer my purpose. For I want to bring about an equalisation of status. The working classes have all these centuries been isolated and relegated to a lower status. They have been Shudras, and the word has been interpreted to mean an inferior status. I want to allow no differentiation between the sons of a weaver, of an agriculturist and of a schoolmaster.[18]

The offer of an accessible education to "lower" castes is a radical offer of a new, indeed, modern

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equality. Quite clearly, it is craft that could overturn an urban-centric book-centered educational system through the emphasis on the manual, productive labour that structured "lower" caste life. The celebration of craft, in a sense, worked against a nationalist art historiography which endorsed art at the expense of the manual-productive dimension of craft, and again, unlike early Indian Art History, the Wardha Scheme acknowledges the material conditions of caste in which craft is born. Nevertheless, the scheme which sought to equalize life chances of all castes ends up teaching the oppressed castes what they knew already and enabled them to pursue occupations that were anyway their lot. In fact, the Zakir Hussain Report explicitly states that

> Economically considered, carried out intelligently and efficiently, the scheme will increase the productive capacity of *our workers* and will also enable them to utilise their leisure advantageously.[19] [Emphasis added]

It is, of course, a moot point whether such a scheme could offer a way out of traditional roles, traditional occupations. In fact, Gandhi was ambivalently placed in relation to the radical possibilities of educational opportunity, which offer the chance of breaking out of oppressive structures. Though Gandhi carefully separates caste from *varṇa* by arguing that unlike *varṇa*, caste is a custom having nothing to do with religion, he finds no difficulty in advocating "the law of *varna* [which] teaches us that we have each one of us to earn bread by following the ancestral calling."[20] According to *varna* "there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and equal in status."[21] However, his careful separation of caste and *varṇa* collapses precisely because he goes along with the idea of "ancestral calling" or occupation determined by birth; Ambedkar writes "As defined by the Mahatma, Varna becomes merely a different name for Caste for the simple reason that it is the same in essence — namely pursuit of ancestral calling."[22] One can see the homology obtaining between Gandhi's espousal of *varṇa* and his scheme of education that envisaged teaching the potter, the weaver, the farmer the very occupation s/he was born into. Craft, tied to occupation, clearly emerges as a category of caste. Craft-centered education does not offer a radical way out of caste oppression in the manner that Ambedkar envisaged because it fails to examine its caste dimensions. Particularly, it does not construe oppression in terms of the fixity of or the limited horizons of life opportunities determined solely by birth. It is this to which Ambedkar draws attention when he argues:

> When can a calling be deemed to have become an ancestral calling so as to make it binding on a man? Must a man follow his ancestral calling even if it does not suit his capacities, even when it has ceased to be profitable?[23]

It seems clear, through this preliminary study of the category craft in the discourses of Art History and Nationalist Education, that craft in India is tied to occupation determined by caste. It would then seem incumbent to re-examine discourses in which craft is entrenched to tease out the implications this might have for an understanding of these discourses.

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## Notes and References

1. See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India,1850-1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. Mitter systematically shows the manner in which the British celebrated the "craft" of India and the delicacy of its decorative art even as they devalued 'high' art forms such as temple sculpture. He quotes Joseph Crowe, a Paris-trained painter and Head of the Painting department in the Bombay Art School; "the grotesque images which libel the shapes of men and animals in all parts of the Hindoo temple, are irredeemably bad. Their sculpted foliage is purely abstract in character . . . it seems the safest way of attempting to regenerate this effete artificial manner of design. . . ." p. 39.
2. See Parul Dave Mukherji, Introduction, *The Citrasutra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, edited and translated by Parul Dave Mukherji, IGNCA and Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2001, pp. xxi-xlv, for an account of the manner in which ancient Sanskrit treatises such as *Citrasūtra* were invoked in debates about the status of ancient Indian artefacts in the first half of the twentieth century as well as of the role of these debates in the consolidation of Indian Art History.
3. See Carol Radcliffe Bolon, "Evidence for Artists of the Early Calukyan Period", *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman*, ed. Michael Meister, Department of South Asia Regional Studies, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 52-66, for an account of research focused on retrieval of artists' signatures in temple art.
4. See Parul Dave Mukherji, "The Dialectics of Nationalism and 'Naturalism': Cultural Politics in the Making of Art History in India," (*Nandan*, vol. 18, 1998), pp. 5-19, for an analysis of the manner in which Sanskrit equivalences for the terms such as 'naturalism' were central to debates about the status and value of ancient Indian art.
5. See, for example, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1934), (Dover, New York, 1956), particularly 'Origin and Use of Images in India' pp. 155-69.
6. Ludo Rocher, 'The Artist in Sanskrit Literature,' *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman*, ed. Michael Meister, p. 18.
7. Stella Kramrisch, *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia, p. 60.
8. The book, a volume put together in the context of the US Festival of India and the Government of India's aggressive marketing of Indian crafts, consists of papers presented at the Annual Seminar of the Department of South Asia Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1986 and is marked by intellectual rigour as well as by careful research.
9. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, Edinburgh, 1913 quoted in Preface, *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman*, ed. Michael Meister, p. ix. This passage is also invoked by K.G. Subramanyan, "The Significance of Coomaraswamy's Ideas in Our Times," *The Living Tradition*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1987, p. 18, to argue that "few of the thousands of image-makers in traditional society would have conformed to this ideal" by passing the caste implications of the passage.
10. "The Social Role of Craftsmen and Artists in Early India," *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman*, ed. Michael Meister, p. 11.
11. *Report of the Zakir Hussain Committee*, 1938; in *Documents on Primary Education in India, 1792-1992* ed. J.C. Aggarwal, Doaba House, Delhi, 1992, p. 57.
12. *Ibid.*, p.59.
13. Glyn Richards has traced Gandhian emphasis on craft and self-reliance back to the early 1920s; he finds no significant shift in Gandhian thinking on education. He notes that Gandhi "favored the correlation of handicrafts and literacy in the field of primary education, because it cultivated the

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creative instincts, promoted self-reliance and encouraged self-sufficiency." *Gandhi's Philosophy of Education*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p. 33. Gandhi himself traced his ideas on education based on craft to his experience of education through craft in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa when Kallenbach taught him shoemaking. "Speech at Educational Conference, October 22 1937", *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 66, Publications Division, New Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India 1976, p. 263. Hereafter CW.

14. For a sense of the pedagogic outcry, see Gandhi's "Some Criticism Answered" CW, pp. 238-241. Even national leaders did not feel too comfortable with his scheme; this is evident in Gandhi's reassurance to Malaviya "saying that there was nothing final about the Conference as it was a Conference of seekers and everyone was invited to offer suggestions and criticisms. He never had the idea of carrying through anything by storm." *Harijan*, dated 30 October 1937, in CW, p. 273.
15. "To National Teachers", CW, p. 150. Although Gandhi favoured spinning he also included crafts such as tailoring, embroidery, paper-making, cutting, book-binding, cabinet-making, toy-making, *gur*-making which could "easily be learnt and handled without much capital outlay," "Questions before the Educational Conference," CW, p. 195.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
17. *Gandhi's Philosophy of Education*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p. 31.
18. 'Talk with a Friend', CW, p. 341.
19. *Report of the Zakir Hussain Committee*, 1938; in *Documents on Primary Education in India, 1792-1992*, ed. J.C. Aggarwal, Doaba House, Delhi, 1992, p. 59.
20. M.K. Gandhi, 'Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment 2," *Harijan* dated 18 July, 1936 in *Annhilation of Caste*, B.R. Ambedkar, ed., Mulk Raj Anand, Arnold, New Delhi, 1990, p.108.
21. *Ibid.*
22. "A Reply to the Mahatma," in *Annhilation of Caste*, B.R. Ambedkar, ed., Mulk Raj Anand, Arnold, New Delhi, 1990, p.124.
23. *Ibid.*, p.120.

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# 29

# Re-Membering Indian Art: Plotting Journeys through Colonial and Postcolonial Discourses

*Rahul Bhattacharya*

> It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians who . . . are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions and who really do want a little Art to shape them. — Edward Fitzgerald

No one wants to belong to a lesser civilization. There is always a certain patriarchal comfort that comes from "great historic roots." It is this that has, perhaps, led nations, particularly postcolonial nations, "to seek out greatness" through literary and archaeological sources. As a student of Art History I have always been struck by the manner in which visual representations of India's past have been understood in exclusively aesthetic terms without any reference to the political or historical context of art. Indeed, the anxiety to present ancient Indian art as an aesthetic watershed has often led into the tricky terrain of Comparative Aesthetics, with systematic parallels being drawn between India and the west in order to prove the value and worth of the former.

However, Art History, a colonial discipline, is surely eurocentric. Therefore, the move to displace colonial hierarchies set-up by Art History through an assertion of the beauty of ancient Indian art can be read as a subversive measure. Nevertheless, *the effect* of this position appears to reinforce the category 'high art' through attempts that envisage higher status for ancient Indian art in the 'high art' bracket. Thus, these arguments constantly buttress rather than displace a classical eurocentric Art History.

Objects go through a "journey," moving across time, space and contexts in their "post-creation" period. In 1971, Jacques Maquet suggested that objects that are aesthetic productions (thus aesthetic commodities) can be classified into the following categories: (1) commodities by destination, (2) commodities by metamorphosis, (3) diversion and (4) ex-commodities.[1] Brenda Danet and Tamar Kutriel have subsequently modified these categories into two: (1) aesthetic objects by destination and (2) aesthetic objects by metamorphosis.[2] This work attempts to plot the "journey" of pre-modern "Indian art" across these categories. I begin by assuming that pre-colonial "Indian artistic tradition"

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did not produce aesthetic objects/commodities "by destiny." Therefore, I will look into the political basis of their "journey" that maps the metamorphosis of pre-colonial "Indian artefacts" into aesthetic objects/commodities. I will also examine the ex-commodity status of "Indian art."

## I

In the early colonial period, the ethnologists and social historians who were involved with the problem of establishing historical relationships between different societies dominated scholarship. The focal point of their interest was the quest for an "original society." A central concern in the debate over the "original society" was the search for the society that was the "fountainhead" of the Arts. Advocates of the Indian and Egyptian claims to be this fountainhead debated fiercely and this resulted in a growing exposure to Indian artefacts, theology, literature and social customs between late 17th and early 19th centuries. It is interesting to know that at this juncture there was no "Indian artefact" in the art section of any European museum, none the less "Indian art" remained an important feature in the construct of the "stagnant oriental art," which was a counterfoil to Johann Joachim Winekelmanns' progressive dynamic European tradition. So on the one hand Indian tradition was recognized as a "producer" of aesthetic objects, but the objects produced by that tradition were not considered as aesthetic objects to be collected but were considered to be either curios or ethnological data.

The accounts of collectors refer to what we now consider to be sculptures as idols/stellas/deities. The collectors themselves are classifiable into categories like memento gatherers, booty accumulators, missionaries and ethnological collectors.[3] Before the late nineteenth to early twentieth century we have no record of any act of collecting "Indian art" for its aesthetic value. This ambivalence in the status of pre-colonial "Indian art" as aesthetic objects clearly underwrites the following passage from Hegel's *Aesthetik*. While commenting on Indian art he writes,

> We may consequently regard it as only the forecourt of art, which is principally in the possession of the east and through which after a variety of transitional steps and mediating passages we are finally introduced to the genuine realization of the Ideal in the classical type of art.[4]

In fact, Hegel has suggested that Indian art was "proto art," almost a stepping-stone for "real" art to launch itself. We see how "Indian art" was given space within the grand narrative of history and at the same time denied any contemporary relevance.

## II

The moot point, however, is whether Indian art was art in the first place. It is possible to suggest, through Maquet's framework, that ancient Indian objects "became" art through an epistemological transformation effected by Art History. In fact, there is a prevalent assumption that what is now

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known as "Ancient" and "Medieval" Indian art was always considered to be art within the pre-colonial Indian context and that it was only after colonial intervention that its status as art was contested. For example, Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters* extensively documents the growth of "Indian art" appreciation. However, this work "speaking in favour of a great art producing tradition," is based on the assumption that objects designated as art at the present time were equally considered to be art objects in the pre-colonial period.

The Indian struggle for independence required an idealisation of the country. Since the very notion of "freedom" and "nation state" was borrowed from the European tradition and since the entire political and cultural leadership derived their knowledge of nation building from Europe, it was only natural that European notions of culture defined Indian notions of cultural heritage. Claims regarding "ancient and medieval Indian art," therefore, have to be seen in this light.

Working with Prezoisi's thesis that "Art" and "Art History" come into being together, it is possible to argue that the constitution of the pre-modern artefact as art in the Indian context simultaneously structured the discipline of Art History.[5] Accepting this thesis one could sit back and dismiss all pre-modern artefacts as not "inherently Art." Prezoisi can be useful in problematising the practice of Art History in India. For example, Indian nationalist scholars use terms like *bhāva, saundarya* and *rūpam* instead of emotion, beauty and form.[6] However, theories of translation have effectively shown that beauty and *saundarya*, for example, have completely different cultural connotations. Although they suffice as autonomous terms they become redundant when used as direct translations.

The strategies employed by orientalists and nationalists through the colonial period, clearly hint that getting recognition as a society that produces/produced aesthetic objects was a matter of a significant restructuring of hierarchies. This agenda, the methodologies adopted and the consequent conceptualisation of Indian art has been documented and analyzed in seminal works such as Tapati Guha-Thakurta's *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art* as well as in Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters* and *Art and Nationalism*. How these strategies influence and intertwine with the changes in 'taste' has been extensively researched in Ratnabali Chatterjee's *From the Kārkhānā to the Studio*.

From Rammohun Roy through Nehru, the construction "grand narratives" has been crucial to nationalist discourse. One element in the construction of the grand narrative of nation has been museography. As Prezoisi argues

> Art history, aesthetic philosophy, museology and art making were historically co-constructed social practices whose fundamental, conjoint mission was the production of subjects and objects consumerate with each other, . . . . for orderly and predictable functioning of the emergent nation states of Europe.[7]

This argument is as valid for India particularly because one of the key agendas of the newly emerging nation state was to construct a narrative of the past which demonstrated a high civilizational standing

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through producing pre-modern artefacts as "high art." For example, V.S. Agrawal from the catalogue of *Masterpieces of Indian Art* (1947) emphasises that

> there is no argument that carries greater persuasion with it in favor of a nation's ideals and way of life than its art, and Indian art richly documenting the past culture of India, has a unique position in this respect as revealing the minds of the people. . . .[8]

At this juncture, I would merely like to point out that the taxonomical shift that occurs in the European mindset leading to a "shift into the art section" (within museum spaces) was exactly the moment (1910-47-8) when the grand narrative of India was "polished." Therefore, when India as a nation came into being "India" had already acquired a venerable "Art" tradition. The process of decolonisation that started at the beginning of the twentieth century — leading to the birth of new nation states demanded modifications in the hitherto European "universal" "grand narrative." On one level, such a singular narrative was required to accommodate the arrival of a multiplicity of new nations each with its own grand narrative.

It is in this context that it might be useful to understand the first truly major exhibition of "Indian art" happened in 1947 in England at the British Royal Academy. Though this event can be understood in terms of a general celebration on the occasion of India's independence, it can also be read in the context of an induction into the contemporary world grand narrative. At the highest point of British colonial domination India had no art. It made progress in that direction during the struggle for independence and it acquired an art heritage and independence simultaneously.

Thus we see a meeting point in the interests of late colonial Europe and the desires of the newly emergent states. What is of interest here is the manner in which different parties appropriated these developments. Heritage and aesthetics found a point of intersection with the market that played a role of "perceived unimportance."[9] "Indian art objects" remained aesthetic objects while outside India they became aesthetic commodities. In 1830, at the Christies' auction of Charles Stuart's collection of Indian artefacts, there was only one bidder and the collection was subsequently "donated" to the British Museum for want of buyers. In 1982, a British art dealer bought the *Pathur Naṭarāja* and 3 less valuable aesthetic commodities for 41,111 pounds.[10]

The framework within which Art is produced, suggests Prezoisi, is one wherein aesthetic objects and commodities reside. There is dynamism inherent in the framework that leads to a constant shuffling of hierarchies within it and Guha-Thakurta[11] has analyzed changing notions of "beauty," "exotic" and "value" as also the influence of the status of "Indian art" as aesthetic objects/commodities.[12] She has delineated the manner in which catalogues for museums, galleries, books and papers written on genre, artists, dynastic/regional/religious/secular/national Art constantly intertwined with the nation-making project, sometimes collaborating with colonial frameworks, sometimes subverting them.

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However, the freezing of pre-modern Indian art in an ex-commodity state in the republic of India betrays an othering of a history that may not subscribe to contemporary imaginings of a glorious past. At the same time, this heritage is open to commodification through tourism and other services as well as for display in our museums, *Festivals of India* or whenever any important foreign dignitaries visit. Practicalities of nation building and commerce may govern such acts. But intrinsically they are in the same line as the occident's othering of the orient, constructing a 'romantic' heritage which is to be preserved by "our" intervention, to be interpreted, used and abused at our convenience.[13]

Art History in India, so far as we are dealing with the pre-modern period, is by and large a state-sponsored project. It is only natural that the State's agenda will underwrite it. One important contribution that New Art History has made is that it has greatly increased the intellectual horizons of resistance through a re-examination of the frames through which art objects are constructed.

## References


1. Arjun Appadurai, *Commodities and the politics of value Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, p. 76, Routledge, London, 1994.
2. Brenda Danet and Tamar Kutriel, *No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting, Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 220.

   Danet and Kutriel use this framework to trace how objects either fit into the construct of art at the point of creation of travel into the construct through socio-political interventions.
3. James Forbes, Reverend Joseph Muller, Charles 'Hindoo' Stuart, Warren Hastings being examples collectors of this period. 1685 catalogue of Ashmolean Museum in Oxford refers to its acquisition 'the Hedges Vishnu' as "Hedges gave to the museum an 'idol' called 'Gonga' that has been acquired from a pagoda on the island Seagur at the mouth of the Ganges". — Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1999, p. 143.
4. As cited in Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 212.
5. . . . for every people and ethnicity, for every class and gender . . . there may be projected a legitimate "art" with its own unique spirit and soul; its own history and prehistory; . . . essentialisms of European museology. *The Art of Art History : A Critical Anthology* (ed.) Donald Prezoisi, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, pp. 513-14.
6. Benoy Shankar was a forerunner in this regard. His 'Aesthetics of young India' being the agent through which he attempts European aesthetics and the Nationalist discourse. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of New Indian Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992.
7. Donald Prezoisi, "The Art of Art History", in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (ed.) Donald Prezoisi, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p. 517.
8. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Making Independence — The Ritual of a National Art Exhibition', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 30-31, New Delhi, Dec. 1997, p. 89.
9. 'Antiquities and Art Treasures Act'. Passed in 1972, prohibits the trading of heritage objects in India. True, the 'underground' trade in these objects do take place, however since the transaction is derecognized it cannot have any theoretical implications on the object status in terms of commodities. However the objects illegally traded can be understood as 'Commodities by Diversion'.


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10. Richard Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi 1999, p. 143.
11. *Op.cit., Journal of Arts and Ideas.*
12. Arjun Appadurai, *Commodities and the Politics of Value: Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce — the author traces factors that affect value of aesthetic commodities. Routledge, London, 1994.
13. Arindam Datta, 'The Politics of Display: India 1886 and 1986', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos.30-31, New Delhi, Dec. 1997. The author discusses this aspect by juxtaposing the 'display' of rural India in Paris and Moscow in 1886 and 1887 respectively. Refer to Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (ed.) Donald Prezoisi, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998. Also refer to Carol Duncan, *Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship Interpreting Objects and Collections*, (ed.) Susane M. Pearce, Routlege, London, 1994.

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# 30

# National Gallery of Modern Art
# Museums and the Making of National Art

*Vidya Shivadas*

Would conventional Art History allow an analysis on the setting up of a museum, the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), within its domain? Maybe not. How would mundane government museum policies make any difference to its trajectory? What could one say about an institution that seems little more than a storehouse for Indian paintings since 1857 — an institution that functions without any apparent agenda? Despite finding itself in the midst of controversies — such as when the then Minister of Culture, Maneka Gandhi, suggested selling part of the collection to make the Gallery financially self-sufficient — the NGMA seems to be unshaken, and the controversies are quickly written off as arbitrary decisions made by individuals in power, in no way reflective of the museum on the whole.[1]

But "new" Art History may be a little more patient for two reasons. For one, it understands history as a "deliberate selection, ordering and an evaluation of past events, experiences and processes"[2] and the museum as its ideological apparatus. When history becomes open for such interrogation, the institutional spaces where it constructs itself are also automatically thrown open for scrutiny. And for the other, it doesn't hold on to Kantian distinctions between pure disinterested art history of the academia and its end-oriented marketplace/museum version.[3] This last is a crucial point, one that allows the vital interface between the discipline and the museum to emerge. Let me expand on this point with an example: art historian W.G. Archer, one of the first to formulate a policy for the NGMA, wrote in his recommendations that he would rather see many works of five or six good artists than have few works by many artists within the Gallery.[4] This is a valid position but one that also implicitly holds that the history of modern Indian art can be written by and through a handful of artists. This more or less continues to remain the dominant trajectory in our history writing; even senior critics like Geeta Kapur subscribe to it at some level. The history of modern art in the marketplace is not much different. The monograph mode of history writing that began with the Lalit Kala publications on individual artists has been taken a step forward with a barrage of expensive coffee table books on the same to hold the relatively recent interest of the

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auction houses. The frame, in both cases, remains individuated with an emphasis on the artist's intention and thereby also limits the possible readings within the field.

"New" Art History gives one the chance to introduce an alternate frame like an art museum, a space where the nation, modernism, the State and art intersect to produce meaning. Two historical phases will be scrutinized in the course of this paper. First, the establishment of the NGMA in 1954, "the only institution of its kind to be run and administered by the Government of India,"[5] set against the backdrop of more general museum policies and the idea of a modern nation. And second, the more nationalist phase of the 1970s and 1980s when the Gallery came under the directorship of L.P. Sihare, and the continuing debate around the appropriateness of abstraction as an art language and derivativeness of modern Indian art.

## Imagining the Nation

> The museum is the surest way of interpreting the world to the masses, and giving the illiterate visitor any conception of the world beyond his village or nearest town, thus expanding his mental horizon.
>
> — S.F. Makham and H. Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*,
> 1st report on Indian Museums, 1936

> India has no proper museums, which is especially detrimental for children because it is from here that they receive their ideas on beauty or lack of it.
>
> — Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister,
> Inaugural address at ICCR 'What is Culture,' 1950

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[6] The imagination was made possible because of fundamental changes in the apprehension of time (what Anderson terms "simultaneous homogenous time") and space (the museum, the census and the map). In order to understand the way in which the Indian nation state was imagined and physically realised in the space of the museum, it is necessary to examine the modes in which India was imagined in other arenas as well. In India, nationalist consciousness arose in the context of colonisation. The nation was a deeply politicized site, which at once accepted and rejected modern universal knowledge as its paradigm. Even while fighting British imperialism, the nation state more or less accepted the institutions of the Empire, its organization of power and its discourses of order and rationality. The nation state, according to Susie Tharu, far from qualitatively reformulating itself at the time of independence, took on the same paternalistic distance from its citizens as its predecessor. Partha Chatterjee further argues that this was made possible by a split within the political realm, at what he calls the "final moment of arrival" of the nation state, into the elite and subaltern. The subaltern (recognized in its otherness) could not be rationally comprehended in its specific subjectivity and hence the intervention of the elite on behalf

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of the subaltern was managed.[7] He enumerates the manner in which Jawaharlal Nehru's idea of political leadership was shaped by the image of a peasantry that needed mature leaders to act on its behalf. The leadership, he believed, was also vested with the responsibility of ushering in the modern civilized world in a newly independent nation. According to Nehru, one had to look for this modern elsewhere, in the universal representation of the spirit of the age: "If we go to foreign countries, it is in search of the present. The search is necessary for isolation from it means backwardness and delay."[8] In fact, it is possible to track the genesis of a loose framework for the new nation that is looking west in search of its modern self to Nehruvian thought. It is within this framework that it might be productive to examine the shaping of cultural institutions like the museum, institutions that are embroiled in the process of governing.

Going by chronology, the first report on Indian museums was published in 1936 by S.F. Markham (Empire Secretary of Museum Association) and H. Hargreaves (Director General, Archeological Survey of India) titled *Museums of India*. The report begins with a historical appraisal of the museums set-up by the British government in India. It begins by observing that the first museum collection in India was founded in 1796, 40 years after the inception of the British Museum followed by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1814 (whose function was to "elucidate the peculiarities of art and nature in the east"[9]) and that twelve museums that were set up by 1857. By 1936, India had a grand total of 105 museums.

However, the Report concluded, if the efficiency of museums was seen as an indication of the cultural level of the country, then India fared very poorly. There was only one museum to every 3.4 million persons in the country. The report also enumerated a number of reasons for this failure: India's essentially rural set up, the fact that the museums were organized, administered and financed by the government and no private endorsement was encouraged, the lack of museum associations, the low level of curatorship (the duo even found 100-year-old mouldy cakes and pastries arranged neatly on one museum shelf!) and finally, the fact that museums were more popular with illiterate masses. The report stressed the need of strengthening the educational aspect of the museum. While earlier museums had been founded as research units (for example, the Museum of Economic Geology was set-up in Calcutta in 1840 as the government had large coal mines in Rānīgañj) or as archeological collections, the time had now come for them to become potential educators, "to awaken, inspire and teach India's 300 million illiterates."[10] The "illiterate masses," however, failed to see the museums as places of learning, preferring to call them *ajaibghar* or curiosity shops. In the 1911 Conference of Orientalists in Simla, Dr. Vogel raised the problem of free admittance in Lucknow and Lahore that attracted too many of the "lower" classes thus deterring the educated strata. In much despair, he concluded that museums appealed chiefly to the Indian sense of wonder and credulity,[11] and that something would have to be done to change the situation.

In independent India, the Markham-Hargreaves Report played a seminal role and was quoted in almost every subsequent policy on museums. In 1954, the Planning Commission asked for the

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inclusion of development of museums in the Second Five Year Plan. An expert committee was asked to survey the needs and make concrete proposals on how to establish museums along scientific lines. The committee asked for the setting up of travelling museums, organized by larger museums, that would be sent to adjoining villages, children's museums dealing with the special problems of child education and village museums that would display specimens of agricultural arts, crafts, Indian sculpture, hygiene and reproductions of modern art, apart from the regional museums and science, industry and engineering museums.[12] The agenda was clearly in favour of emancipating the rural population and civilizing them into modern citizens because it was the rural setup that best exemplified the "weak, narrow and self-absorbed social structure, the main reason why we became a colony in the first place."[13] Its development was, therefore, imperative.

The museum was also an important institution for an emerging nation's self-image in the international world. For one thing, it was mandatory to belong to the International Community of Museums (ICOM) if one were to receive benefits from the UNESCO. The Indian National Commission was set-up as early as 1949 to collaborate with UNESCO on this account. As a part of this new found international solidarity, the UNESCO sent a series of reproduction exhibitions (*Braque to Riveria, Modigalani to Georgia Keefe* and *70 self-portraits of European artists during inter-war period*) in 1950. In a 1953 symposium *Art and Education* organized by the UNESCO, Walter Battis's paper *Old Patterns and New Ideas* explained the rationale behind sending these exhibitions to African and Asian countries. Giving the example of the Bantus of Africa, he pointed out that European art had a profound influence on them, but unfortunately they seemed to like all that was ostentatious and vulgar in the European tradition.

> This hasty superficial absorption of European cultural forms is an inevitable feature of our present period of transition but can be remedied by showing them the best reproductions if not originals of art such as Byzantine contribution, Giotto, Van Gogh, Matisse and so on.[14]

It is within this prescriptive internationalism and the nation state's own hierarchical application of such a framework that one can look at the setting up of the National Gallery of Modern Art. In the Conference on Museums for evolving a programme for the improvement of museums in India (1954), the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education, Ashfaque Husain sought the recommendations of historian W.G. Archer. Archer was asked to visit 14 archeological sites, 17 ancestral collections, 20 museums and four art schools functioning under the Government of India in a period of three months and offer his opinions on their status. On the NGMA, Archer had this view to offer. He thought that the NGMA was making good progress though he recognized the difficulty of getting adequate and representative works by important artists like Jamini Roy, Gaganendranath Tagore, etc. Further, he said that

> Easily the most impressive pictures at Jaipur House are those of Amrita Sher-Gil (her

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> father Umrao Singh Sher-Gil presented almost all her works to Nehru, after her death). They are a superb achievement and give the collection a solid core of greatness. So far as living artists are concerned, it is probably better to represent a few artists with five or six works each as opposed to a large number of living artists with one work each. It has to be remembered that the actual number of living artists whose works really deserve to be mentioned is very small and it takes a great deal of courage to recognize originality. Living artists whose works I would like to see are Sailoz Mukherjee, Gopal Ghose, S. Chavda, M.F. Husain, K.K. Hebbar. Of the living sculptors, only Dhanraj Bhagat stuck of any real importance.[15]

This letter was cited prominently as part of the museum policies of the Second Five Year Plan. Archer's views on the NGMA were taken very seriously even when his ideological position remained clear —- "of charting a genealogy of influences and drawing a ledger of European sources used by the Indian artist."[16] The four artists of his choice — Amrita Sher-Gil, Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore and Jamini Roy — were valorized as the pioneers of modern Indian art. The Bengal school, on the other hand, was conspicuous in its absence. The art movement that had a strong link with the nationalist movement was cast aside. Herman Goetz, the first director of the NGMA (1954-56) writes,

> Thus the Bengal . . . School became the medium of expression of the mass mentality . . . and the nationalist successor to the role which Raja Ravi Varma's pictures had played during the dominance of British rule. . . Thus, also the Bengal school represents not modern Indian art, but another step in its direction . . . It has become the first genuine national style, . . . But its very success was its undoing. It ended in cheap mass production, . . . and never came really to grips with modern India.[17]

Goetz main grudge against the Bengal School is its mass appeal. But behind this simplistic pointing out of the "failing" of Bengal School to come to terms with modern India, lay the more complex issue of the very essence of modern art, which by its definition could be understood only by a few. The comment also provides an insight into the role of the modern nation that chose to be hierarchical and could not promote art that was part of popular consciousness. At that time, the Bengal School was not permitted to play any role in the manner in which the modern nation was envisaged. In a report on the acquisition of art exhibits for NGMA in 1953, it was decided that the curator would be declared the head of the office giving him general powers of expenditure under the Government of India. In the case of modern art acquisitions it was felt that regional advisory committees (set-up to review purchases made by the heads annually) were not effective. It was decided to disband them for this purpose because it was assumed, by Goetz among others, only the four metropolitans needed small committees as it was believed that these places were where modern art was being produced.[18] One can track how modern art, in its early formulations within the Gallery,

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was clearly defined as art made by few individuals, art made in the four metros, art that was not mass in its appeal and art that was getting its signals from the trends in the west.

**In Search of Self: Neo Tantra as Solution?**

By the 1960s the all-embracing internationalism of the earlier generation was seen as highly problematic. The consolidation of third world consciousness, the Civil Rights and anti-war movements, the setting up of NAM and sporadic students movements all over the world supported moves by Third World countries to break away from the hegemony of the west. In the Indian art scene, two things were happening. One, the Indigenist Movement was taking shape with artists like J. Swaminathan demanding that Indian artist should be confronting and not confirming the west. And two, Indian artists had come in contact (through the Rockfeller Scholarship, among other things) with abstract expressionism that was being institutionalized in America with support of the US government, museums like Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and influential critics like Clement Greenberg.

Abstraction suited the Americans because it coincided with their individualism. They were no longer accused of being derivative of European art. The "automatism" that was privileged could be attributed to the American penchant for individualism and an obsession for self via gesture. However, abstraction did not operate as such a liberating option for the Indian artists. While artists of the earlier generation like M.F. Husain and Sailoz Mukherjee had dealt with the charge of derivativeness by using western language and Indian subject-matter, abstraction's obsession with surface only made the second-handedness of Indian art more "obvious." It also left the question of identity of the Indian artist unresolved for Selfhood and subjectivity of the Indian artist "require acts of allegorical exegesis — often via the nation."[19] Indian art was clearly caught between two positions — on one hand it subscribed to an international model (where now abstraction was ruling) and on the other, it had to continue to "imagine the nation," continue to address the question of Indian identity. M.F. Husain speaks of this tension when he asks "How can I go abstract when there are 600 million people around me in India?"[20]

While this debate over the language of abstraction was taking place within the art world, how was the issue being addressed within the NGMA? Anis Farooqi, director of NGMA, 1985-94, sheds light on the discussions that took place in the late 1950s and 1960s around representational and non-representational art forms. He recounts that sculptor and founder member of Calcutta Progressive Artists Group, Pradosh Das Gupta, who was the director of NGMA between 1957 and 1970, held the strong view that only those images which went well with Indian philosophy and iconography should be represented as modern Indian art. He argued that abstraction had been fundamentally rejected from ancient days in India. His position was however challenged by many younger artists like Satish Gujral, Dhanraj Bhagat and Amarnath Sehgal who felt image making was restricting their fundamental freedom of expression. Therefore, says Farooqi, they began to explore abstraction

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because they had decided that the artist was neither commentator nor a social reformer. In 1962, abstraction was finally accepted officially within the Gallery but it continued to retain an uneasy place because of its inability to deal with questions of identity.[21]

At this point, it might be useful to bring in another actor into the frame — L.P. Sihare, director of NGMA (1971-84). Sihare arrived at the scene when all these debates where occupying centre stage. He gave the Gallery a new agenda in response to the Indigenist movement. It might be useful to evaluate the nature of his project and examine the manner in which he sought to legitimise abstraction within the Gallery.

Sihare completed his Masters in Art Criticism and Museology from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda. He then went to the Institute of Fine Arts in New York where he wrote his doctoral thesis *Oriental Influences on Kandinsky and Mondrian, 1909-17*. He returned to India to join the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta after which he became the director of NGMA. After retiring from the NGMA, he went on to occupy the same position at the National Museum. While at the NGMA, Sihare adopted three distinct methods by which to arrive at a more assertive national identity — first, by reviewing the contribution of the Bengal School; second, by organizing a spate of international exhibitions and finally, by attempting to construct a history of modern Indian art within the Gallery.

Under Sihare's stewardship, the Bengal School was revisited in an attempt to review the works of Indian artists of earlier generations. Nandalal Bose, Benod Behari Mukherji and Abanindranath Tagore were added on to the collection around this period. Sihare tried to work against their negative reception by means of critically positioning himself against W.G. Archer's evaluation of the Bengal School. In fact, he was vital to the reassessment and reinstitution of the Bengal school in general and these painters in particular in the national art scene. From his 1971 exhibition *Abanindranath Tagore and His Disciples* to the *Nandalal Centenary Exhibition* in 1982, Sihare spent a decade taking the Bengal School out of a regional frame and placing them firmly within a national one. However, he admitted that all their works raised the problem of attribution. He also acknowledged that it was difficult to evaluate their contribution in the context of international modern art.[22] They constituted a face of the nation that would be carefully sifted from the image that was presented to the international world.

A spate of international exhibitions was organized during the 1970s. For Sihare, the concept of exchange of international exhibitions was inspired by the highest ideals of the sharing of cultural wealth but he lamented that things turned out quite differently in practice. Despite commitments, first world countries found ways to escape their moral and professional responsibilities by sending works that were not classified as "masterpieces." On the other hand, the Indian government was always pressurizing its museums to send some of their best works, whatever their condition, as soon as cultural agreements were signed.[23] Sihare was all set to address this imbalance by demanding only the best works from other countries. For example, when the Rodin show came to India under

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the Indo-French Cultural Exchange in 1983, Sihare was critical of certain "shortcomings." He wrote in the catalogue,

> The famous *Gates of Hell*, the publicized true size monument of *The Burghers of Calais* and over life-size sculpture of *Balzac* are missing. Except for one comparatively insignificant marble *The Source* some of the famous marble works are not included.[24]

Geeta Kapur has, in fact, recalled the manner in which Sihare stood at the airport and refused to let the smaller Rodin sculptures enter the country! When the exhibition of contemporary Polish paintings arrived in 1975, he was upset that the show covered "only 15 middle-aged painters of Warsaw." Sihare made it very clear that the NGMA, and through it the nation, was going to accept only the best from the world and was equal to everyone else.

Despite these valuable interventions in the institution of modern Indian art, Sihare's history of modern Indian art was somewhat disappointing. In 1971, he came out with a catalogue *Selected Surrealist Paintings from NGMA Collection* followed by *Selected Expressionst Paintings from NGMA Collection*. He allotted rooms for paintings that qualified as cubist, surrealist and expressionist. According to him, while fauvism, Dadaism and futurism had not caught the Indian artists' imagination, these three were key movements of inspiration for them. While Rabindranath Tagore had pioneered both expressionism and surrealism in India, he argued, Gaganendranath Tagore was the first to use cubism. The display had to be dismantled soon after being set up because it was severely criticised as being "mindlessly derivative."[25] The system of classification, however, continued to structure his writings on modern Indian art. It is within this completely uninspiring and derivative history of modern Indian art that it is possible to return to the earlier query regarding the fate of abstraction within the Gallery.

In the 1978 catalogue of Contemporary Indian Art Exhibition sent to Damascus, abstraction finds mention as an influential art movement in India, pioneered by Ramkinkar Baij and carried on by N.S. Bendre. In the course of next few years, all the paintings that had previously been classified as surrealist were recast as abstract art and abstract art itself metamorphosed into Neo Tāntric art. By the early 1980s Neo Tantra became India's chief export item, part and parcel of the Festivals of India. The same collection of 56 paintings were sent to Stuttgart in 1983-84, to USA in 1985-86, to Federal Republic of Germany in 1985-86 and Australia in 1986-87.

Brian Wallis has delineated the economic profile of the countries that organized $ 15 million Festivals in USA. All these countries

> have huge international debts, cheap labor markets, valuable exports managed by multinationals and a gradually privatizing state industry under the I.M.F. Nowhere is the unprecedented collapse of what had been distinguishable as economic and cultural spheres more obvious.[26]

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Moreover, the fact remains that even though the Neo Tantra exhibition that was conceived in order to establish India's status within the international community, it actually dramatized conventional versions of our self-image. The stereotypical differences between the East and West and assertion of past glories were strengthened in the process. The place of an alternative self-image that India could have acquired after 35 years of independence was left nowhere in the state's agenda. Promoting Neo Tantra neatly contained the debate that abstraction generated about art language, identity and the role of modern art in the making of India. This facile national assertion was a logical outcome of the internationalism of the 1940s and 1950s. Fredric Jameson might write that the nation was a site of resistance for third world countries, their only hope against global American post-modern culture. But the nation, as constructed within the NGMA, did not work out to be a site of resistance. In fact, it was then, as it is now, an institution that is in deep alliance with an international modern and its forms of cultural imperialism.

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# 31

# Constructing a Museological Paradigm of Living Cultures: The Making of the South Asia Gallery at the Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore

*Gauri Parimoo Krishnan*

## General Background

When I first walked into the stores of the then National Museum, Singapore[1] in August 1993 as its newly appointed curator for South Asia, I had spotted a post-Gupta sandstone Mukhaliṅgam, a dancing Kṛṣṇa in bronze of the Coḷa period, a clutch of erotic ivory carvings and a Deccani *picchavāi*. The collection was piecemeal and was begun with a view to showcase the artistic and cultural significance of the Indian subcontinent. The South Asian collection *per se* was conceived very recently, just about ten years ago, and I got associated with it right after its inception.

The consideration for having a museum of Asian civilizations was conceived and announced by the former Minister of the Ministry of Information and the Arts, Brig. General George Yeo.[2] This Ministry was resurrected from the former Ministry of Culture to oversee the development of the Art industry in Singapore in 1990. The National Heritage Board,[3] an umbrella organization was set-up to manage museums on Singapore's history (Singapore History Museum), ancestral cultures of Singaporeans (Asian Civilizations Museum; ACM) and Contemporary Art (Singapore Art Museum). The Oral History Center and the National Archives were also brought under the umbrella of the National Heritage Board (NHB). Even a people's museum and a children's museum were planned which never materialized. Taking on its collection from the former National Museum which was run as a Department of the Civil Service, the National Heritage Board became a statutory board with a Parliamentary Act. Speaking at an exhibition opening *Gems of Chinese Art* held at the Empress Place building (where the Asian Civilizations Museum II will open in 2003) Minister Yeo said,

> The Asian Civilizations Museum is not intended for Singaporeans alone. It is intended for all Asians and for all those who want to understand Asia. We should establish such a museum because Singapore is a center of Asian cultures with a remarkable mix of races, languages and religions.[4]

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For many who knew Singapore in the 1980s find the 1990s a sea change when considering Government's keenness to develop the art scene in Singapore. Commitment to develop museums is unprecedented here and a long-term plan not only to conserve old buildings and refitting them to establish a world class museum, conservation standards and at the same time build up a collection of relevant artefacts is commendable.[5] The museum with special focus on Asian artefacts, to which I got attached, saw to the development of West Asia/Islamic as well as South Asian collection as its new mandate in addition to its inherited South-East Asian and East Asian collections.[6] The South-East Asian collection was formerly part of the National Museum, which began as the Raffles Library and Museum some 115 years ago. Raffles collected natural specimens and ethnographic artefacts from many tribal and courtly cultures of South-East Asia, leaving behind some examples at Singapore. Other artefacts were gradually bought or were donated, although the funding for acquisition was never generous. Funding for purchasing artefacts was very limited even in the 1980s and the conditions for storage was not that great.[7] Today, both these have improved several notches.

## Collection Policy of ACM and Positioning of South Asia

ACM's main aim was to showcase the social and cultural achievements of the people of the Chinese, Malay and Indian worlds including west Asia from where Islam originated. The museum set out to preserve and document the material culture, the so-called "rare arts" of these civilizations that in turn conveys the multicultural makeup of Singaporeans' ancestral cultures. Although Singapore is a young nation, its people trace their ancestry to India, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Middle East and Europe. The ACM is in a sense a political construct that attempts to manage and balance the expectations of many ethnic communities within Singapore without singling out any one of them as the most important. The other aim for the ACMs set up was opportunistic, to provide a home for the collections of Asian art in the holding of collectors and corporations on the eve of the hand over of Hong Kong. Even an art collector's scheme was put in place which would encourage collectors to bring their prized collection into Singapore in return for a Permanent Resident status, a secure and "state of the art" repository and a museum to showcase the collection. This in particular was good for attracting collectors of Chinese art but not so much for the South-East, South and West Asian artefacts. The decision to set up ACMI with special focus on Chinese arts was opportune in that sense. There was another focus as well, which was on South-East Asia exploring ideas such as "diversity," "adaptation" and "cultural interaction" which were tossed around and exhibits related with trade, religion, migration and communication were expected to be set up. The story line was expected to be thematic as well as schematic that would highlight star pieces and if the visitors were enthusiastic to learn more than they could explore the detailed displays. There were two approaches mooted for the interpretation of Asian societies and their art. The then Director C.G. Kwa wrote,

> The first will be to place the selected theme within its cultural context and trace its development through time. The Museum will within this contextual framework avoid

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> interpreting culture and civilisation as evolutionary stage through which societies and cultures pass, from Neolithic hunter-gatherers to farming villages to civilised urban centers. Rather, the Museum will project civilisation and culture as information and communication systems within which societies interact to gain an adaptive advantage. . . . The other perspective the Museum will attempt is an empathetic understanding of Asian societies and cultures; to explain to our Asian visitors that we think very differently about the same things. The Museum will attempt to point out that we view not only the environment, but our fellowmen and ourselves in very different terms. . . .[8]

This is the direction in which collecting as well as interpretative work has progressed that attempts not only to explain certain unique practices that exist in rapidly westernising Asia but could be understood only when seen in its localised context.

Furthermore,

> Southeast Asian cultures, the exhibits will attempt to demonstrate was not swamped by Buddhist, Brahmanic or Islamic cultures as is unfortunately widely assumed, but selectively borrowed and adapted what it borrowed.[9]

This not only goes to show that the influences from all the regions contributing to the "melting pot" are important notices in order to study the nature of the South-East Asian cultures but the truly indigenous culture needs special scrutiny. Taking cue from this and furthering the exploration of the nature of the "Indian influence" in South-East Asia, the South Asian gallery aligned itself to explore the origins of the influences on one hand and the nature of the culture brought and perpetuated by the diaspora in the region on the other. This two-way exchange we have documented as well as analyzed tracing their origins in nineteenth and twentieth century India or even earlier.

Through the Bay of Bengal, even before the Christian era, exchange of goods, people and ideas has been going on between Malaya, southern Thailand and India, through different historical periods. A drain of gold and spices was followed by cash remittances; the drain from Malaya to India has a long history. In former periods India supplied goods while in the latter, labour.[10] Situated strategically both India and Malaya were suitably used as entrepots for goods for onward exchange, from South-East Asia and China to the west and vice versa. Island of Sumatra, Kedah coast on the North-East coast of the Malaya Peninsula and the Isthmus of Kra in southern Thailand has yielded examples of rich cultural interaction. Examples of Hindu-Buddhist architecture, inscriptions in Sanskrit and Pallava *grantha* script have been found from the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.

> From the sixth century, it becomes evident from the abundant artefacts of an Indian character that the ports of the Kedah coast on the mouths of Sungai Bujang, the Sungai Merbok and the Kuala Muda were major ports of call for the Indian traders.

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> While they waited for the monsoon to be over, they left their cultural imprint on the land, dotting the coastal area with Hindu shrines.

Right from the beginning of the Current Era all the way till about twelfth-thirteenth centuries, the trading and cultural contact with parts of South-East Asia and India have remained active, changing patterns as the focus on trade changed, transporting spontaneously language, religion, polity, architecture and philosophy.

The ethnic proportion of Indians is 7.9 per cent of the total population of Singapore while within that the largest proportion is that of Tamil Hindus. The others are Malayalis, Sikhs and Punjabis, Sindhis, Gujaratis and others. Categories like Hindi and Hindustani also exists, which to me still remain enigmatic.[11] Many more communities such as the Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, etc., are not either not captured or not spelt out by the Census while Sinhalese are included in the list of Indians as a category. There is a large Muslim population from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh that is economically as well as socially very active but their numbers are not clearly indicated in the census. Besides Hindus and Muslims, there are Sikhs as well as Jains, the former make their presence felt due to the prominent Gurudwaras they have constructed island wide while the Jains mostly gather in residential premises. The religious practices of all these communities are very unique and there is no government ban on religious practices. Although some cults are frowned upon other cults such as the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement were officially recognized only very recently.

The collection policy for the South Asia collection was drawn up in 1991-92 with fundamental rationale of bringing to light ancestral cultures of Singaporeans including the Indians and to recognize the greatness of Indian civilization compared with that of China and South-East Asia. Although the great civilizations of Greece, Mesopotamia and Egypt have become extinct, those of India and China still prevail. It is this lineage to which the Singaporeans are urged to savour and imbibe values from. The policy brief not only contained the areas in which collection should be developed but also projected the types of artefacts and benchmark prices. Hindu, Buddhist materials such as stone and bronze sculptures, decorative arts from the Sultanate and the Mughal periods and miniature paintings from the various north Indian schools were identified as possible acquisition areas.[12] Based on this projection, a five-year funding plan was approved by the government for acquisition of artefacts.

Besides a five-year programme of collection building, we also embarked on a plan to stage exhibitions with loan artefacts to develop audience interest in Indian culture. The first exhibition was *Way of the Buddha* in 1993 taken on loan from the Indian Museum, Kolkata followed by *Alaṅkāra: 5000 Years of India* in 1994. The latter was a whopping success as it drew 165,000 visitors over a span of five and a half months to the museum. It was organized at the former National Museum over 900 sq m with 330 objects from the National Museum, New Delhi. This was the first exhibition under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between India and Singapore that received great support from all quarters and still remains a benchmark of success in museum collaboration, audience

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development and cultural exchange riding on successful economic development. The artefacts were chronologically selected but arranged in thematic order which enabled us to explore themes such as ornamentation, food, costume and jewellery, pastime, warfare, love and devotion.[13] The same thematic approach extended to the catalogue that accompanied this exhibition.[14] Subsequently, we delved into themes of *Kṛṣṇalīlā* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, both developed into full-scale exhibitions, the latter being a seminal exhibition and publication[15] on South and South-East Asian variations in the epic and its representation in visual and performing arts.

As the focus of this paper is very much influenced by my current preoccupation with the design and set-up of the South Asia gallery, this article does not delve much into the experience of collecting and the gamut of issues related with it. Hence the approach is more curatorial in terms of exhibition and various conceptual preoccupations related with it.

**Storyline for the South Asia Gallery**

The Cosmos and Man relationship embodied in the Vedānta philosophy, lifestyle philosophies of the Hindus such as *yoga*, religions like Jainism and Buddhism and their sectarian practices in India, caste system, *curries*, *tandūrī*-chicken and Bollywood movies, these are some of the stereotypes one generally comes across when India is referred to abroad. It is either over philosophised and orientalised, or underrated as blind faith. It is very hard to find a balanced view on India outside its shores. Recently I came across an article on saffronisation in Financial Times from London that left me sad.[16] The criticism about the country's pluralistic identity being replaced by an explicitly Hindu one has been under scrutiny for sometime. Indigenous origins of Sanskrit and Aryans are being questioned, and thus overenthusiasm of the saffron lobby to draw attention to indigenous roots has been questioned. The overemphasis on Hinduism and the rewriting of history are being questioned, there is politicization of Archaeology even! India is getting divided on grounds of religion in a damaging way all over again, while here our attempt is to project a positive unified image regardless of the current domestic situation, outside of India.

In Singapore specifically, typical Indian stereotypes envelop colour, language and cultural habits. I myself have some first hand experience of these patterns of behaviour like scores of Indians have had in various other parts of the world. In our generation, we have no spokesperson or *yugapuruṣa* such as Vivekananda or Gandhi to raise the consciousness of people abroad (as well as within India) about what Indian culture really stands for; twenty-first century may not even see another Sister Nivedita or Mother Theresa again!

I wonder which culture do I defend, which culture do we refer to in the context of the South Asia gallery in Singapore — people know only the corruption and red tape when engaging in business with India. They see filth, blind faith and rigid mindset when they visit India. No one knows that India had the first university since Mauryan times in pre-Christian era, and was most prominent for education on diverse areas and schools of knowledge when the western world was still evolving.

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Although, many of our progressive traditions have not continued, and the degenerate ones unfortunately have, Indian traditions of the past are still living and the polemics of modernity versus tradition actually coexist. This is true even in case of the diaspora, which has continued some elements of their cultural traditions along and wherever they have settled down some practices and beliefs have continued. Although there are degenerate elements of tradition, which unfortunately have survived but that is true about many cultures, civilizations and religions even, it is hard for society to dissociate from them, and they must be condemned. Here I am referring to social, economic and religious practices which are regressive and much rather be abolished. But a healthy blend of social and personal well-being pursued through culture, language, religion and spirituality are most welcome, especially in a foreign land. I have always seen that as a strength than a weakness because that is what makes us all Indians (even Asians) what we are — a unique blend, true fussionists. Some have stayed away from westernisation completely but embraced it in one way or the other nevertheless, in the spirit of internationalism as the most contemporary version of globalization.

My predicament as a curator, conceptualizing and executing the story line, collection policy and the gallery design was vulnerable, I would have either succumbed to the existing norm abroad or turned nationalistic and glorified the ossified Indian culture in its idealistic form in many ways. I attempted to steer away from both, succumbing to either would be pretentious and bemoaning the current reality against the idealistic past. Instead, I embraced it, especially what I saw among the Indian diaspora in Singapore and decided to weave the story of their culture through the various sections of the gallery. This way I tried to bring a flavour of the current practices into the museum and in turn offer a sense of ownership to the community. In any case, the South Asia gallery cannot be a true reflection as I am not trying to recreate any one community's experience but present an essential reference for the visitors to learn, interact and explore more. In this attempt, I have gone under the skin, almost dissected the current reality, very often by striking a familiar chord which gets either overlooked or generalised. Engaging in a postmodern discourse relating personal identity, shared identity or forced identity, rootedness and emigration, the South Asia gallery hopes to highlight the inheritance of Indian culture in Singapore, its relation to the cultural identity of South-East Asia and the future of Indians in Singapore.

**Design Inspiration for the South Asia Gallery**

South Asia galleries are situated on the ground floor of the Empress Place building and the visitors will generally reach there after they have been through the various galleries on the first floor namely the South-East Asia, East Asia and West Asia. The contextuality of the gallery space which is a colonial building, tall ceiling, massive columns, arches and cornices, defines the gallery space in an overwhelmingly specific period context. Curators had to fit Asian artefacts within this given space by coexisting and not hazarding decontextualisation of the architecture and the artefacts. This is the usual tussle a team of curator and designer go through over and over. In the South Asia galleries we

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decided to allow the architecture to envelop the gallery space. We decided to paint it in a neutral but warm and inviting colour. Keeping with the contextualising spirit, we even kept the vault doors and iron grill[17] intact in the performing arts and sanctum — *maṇḍapam* area to evoke the feeling of a *gūḍha maṇḍapa* and *garbhagṛha* of a Hindu temple. This way we lent a new meaning to the original space by invoking its spatial experience and linking it with a typical ancient Hindu temple sanctum and *maṇḍapam*. Below is a short interview with Patrick Keyser, the architect-designer who contributed greatly to the realisation of the design intent of the South Asia gallery. Despite his scant familiarity with India, his design has transcended beyond doubt in absorbing the Indian ethos and spirit and translated it quite convincingly into the spatial arrangement of the South Asia gallery.

**Conversation with Patrick Keyser on the Design of the South Asia Gallery**

Patrick Keyser is the designer of the South Asia gallery who has been involved in its creation right from the start two years ago. He graduated with a degree in Architecture from University Laval, Québec, Canada. He is an architect by profession and has been involved in the field of exhibition with GSM Design, Montreal since 2000. GSM is the consulting exhibition design firm engaged by the Asian Civilizations Museum at Empress Place. Keyser has worked on diverse exhibition projects in Chile, Tokyo, New Caledonia and Montreal and has wide experience of planning and designing public buildings of diverse nature.

Gauri: What is your design inspiration for the SA gallery?

Patrick: It all began with our India trip when we visited the archaeological sites. Be they Hindu, Buddhist or Islamic, I looked at them for the first time as complete "whole" and understood their design and architectural features. I tried to visualise that artefacts are but fragments of these large monuments. When looking at the artefacts in the gallery, which are fragments of the "whole," I began to see their relationship, how the fragment and the "whole" relate to each other. Sometimes when you have specific artefacts such as the lintel or threshold, which you do in your collection, I pay special attention to these elements in the architecture and try to translate them into my design. So there is a direct reference to architectural elements like lintel and threshold from the ancient temples that come into play and I began to pay more attention to them. I draw this from your contextualisation approach.

I take different approaches to tackle the various elements of the original context of the site when designing the display. I therefore look for certain key feature that I can add to the display to create an impression of the "whole." In some cases, such as the "Science and Technology" wall in the South Asia gallery, which follows the design inspiration from Jantar-Mantar in New Delhi, I begin with a peculiar detail of the architecture and slowly abstract it. I do this by eliminating the details and leading the visitor's attention on to the abstracted form, shape and rhythm. I also use proportion and colour in my design process to rebuild an architectural context. But I do not overplay on various

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elements, I just try to focus on one or two essential elements only and if through that the message is conveyed, I feel my design has been successful. I believe that in display design, the artefact is most important and not decor. I am used to working with natural light but in museum displays we need special lights, so I am quite sensitive to using lighting for creating moods, and emotions. This helps to bring out the best qualities in the sculpture which may vary from sculpture to sculpture. In this context I agree with your approach to displaying sculptures with special lighting. This is another way to make the artefact stand out.

Gauri: Tell me more about the process of thinking you went through for the temple wall?

Patrick: For instance the proportional drawing developed by Ratan Parimoo for the *maṇḍovara* of Sunak temple[18] which we studied closely was my starting point to see the proportion ratio between different facets of the pilasters and see what is the rhythm that it creates. Then in talking to you I clarified cardinal points and niches with important sculptures in them are very important. I tried to adapt this aspect but could not make much headway in this direction since space available was not enough. So now I look at the images first, the relationship of the mother goddess (our most important image on that wall) and its relationship with the *apsarā* and *vyāla*. I began to plot them on the wall with their width as the dimensional reference and then planned the width of each pilaster of the wall. This method helped because the ratio of multiples of 5 seemed just right and it just naturally evolved. I tried this proportion not just in the layout but also in elevation and made sure that it worked. I always work in layout, followed by elevation and 3D rendering because that is how one will learn whether the concept is right or not and how it works.

In the case of the original context of medieval temple wall, *adhiṣṭhāna* plays a major role, but in our design I eliminated it completely to simplify the design and tried to elaborate the wall facets, establish the proportion of the width of each facet, to fit large and small sculptures. In my view variation in proportion is achievable and more desirable. I did not try to have uniform size facets but played up on their differences based on the width of the sculptures.

Gauri: Tell me more about your design approach for the gateway which is a bigger fragments of "the whole" and we are almost recreating their spatial experience. I imagine it should be a virtual experience!

Patrick: The design brief given by you itself was the starting point. The experience of walking under the gateway and enabling visitors an experience of that kind was the direction in which I began exploring my design inspiration. It also was important to note that it is not an "arc de triomphe" but an entrance to a home. This gateway also leads to the main axis of the gallery and is the most important artefact on the axis that helps to shape the design of the whole gallery. The arches on two sides done with modern material and the decor walls on either sides of the gateway help to reinforce the experience but the main impact will be created when people enter the gateway. We try to elongate the depth of the arch under which people are going to walk so that the experience of

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passing through the gateway is further enhanced. The idea of "entering" a space from outside to inside is also evoked thereby.

Gauri: What in particular inspired you from our trip to India?

Patrick: I took inspiration from the buildings we saw in Agra, Mathurā and Delhi, some of the arched corridors, courtyards and balconies were my sources. Even elements like the masculine and feminine flavors in the proportions of pillars, detailing of motifs and parts of the structure also played a part. The other inspiration was from contextual paintings, from Pahārī and Rājasthānī miniatures, they help to bring the architecture alive, and it was easy to visualise how architecture is actually peopled. Our recent trip also helped to personally experience the proportions and relation of Mughal and Rājpūt buildings to human scale. The final test is how we arrange the rest of the space with the summer carpet, marble railings and screens and recreate some sort of natural light to envelop this space. As for colours, I like to use neutral colours to allow the artefact to be "seen." I also like a balance of masculine and feminine flavours, not excessively loud or overdecorative but a good balance of both.

Gauri: What is your over all design philosophy when working on exhibition design?

Patrick: I try to understand the artefact first, where it comes from and what it has to say. I also follow the curator's instinct and explore the context of the artefact through their interpretation. I believe that the artefacts should be the anchors of the gallery and it should be able to guide the visitor, the entire decor is only secondary and helps to enhance the impact of the artefact. The context is also important but basically play up the richness of the artefact, capture the spirit of it and try to translate even if its only a fraction of the original.

**Display of South Asia Gallery**

The gallery layout and story line for South Asia is defined keeping in view the cultures of the diaspora living in Singapore today that directly or remotely owes its origin to more than one parts of the subcontinent. The structure of the collection is thematic although chronology is the connecting link or the spine. Themes are arranged in a loosely linked temporal as well as spatial context attempting a semiotic interpretation of the artefacts bearing synchronic and diachronic links along the way. The display begins with the earliest or the ancient most reference point in time although it is very hard to illustrate these concepts through artefacts. Because of the nature of collecting and lack of relevant artefacts, the thematic approach is not only practical but also imperative. Some of the prominent themes in this gallery are religions, festivals, and performing arts, visual and decorative arts and architecture that create a visual semblance of their original context, function and meaning. Themes such as music and literature are explored mainly through multi-media. Even then, the experiential rationale has been applied to each thematic group, consisting of artefacts of same or different media. We explore aspects of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, which travelled to South-East Asia through

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trade, missionaries and migrations. The Malayan Peninsula and the former Federation of the Malaya (Singapore being part of the Federation until 1965) from the earliest times until 1800s has had direct contact with India. Thus linking the two regions and their interactions over time starting from today's contemporary context referring back is important.

South Asia is introduced from the earliest civilizations, about the debate on the origins of the Aryans and Harappan period people residing in the Indus-Sarasvatī plains and their lifestyle which could be constructed with the help of archaeological remains. The prevailing "Aryan invasion theory" has been re-examined in the light of the new data.[19] Of the last 50 years, Dholavira, in western India remains the most comprehensive and large scale evidence of an urban civilization to have come to light. Dholavira is truly fascinating for its complexity, technology and depth of information it has revealed about life that could be lived in and before 2000 BCE. It has a fortress, middle town and lower town, a well and bath area, main market-street and a stadium. It has an inlay of script on an entrance wall that is found for the first time, although not decipherable. There are three water reservoirs, high walls and gates and a scheme of defence and attack. The urban nature of this settlement is very significant and has many cultural ramifications that need to be studied and discussed. A curatorial and exhibition designer team led by myself visited the site in December 2000 and images shot during this visit will be projected in this gallery.

A beautiful collection of gold coins on loan from the Chand collection in this section refers to the images of early kings such as Kanishka I (*c.*123-150 CE) and Samudragupta, founder of the imperial Gupta dynasty (*c.* 330-380 CE). As polity is one of the cornerstones for the formation and flowering of any civilization, this display of coins helps to project the personalities of the kings who were celebrated during and after their lifetimes for taking their kingdom on a higher plane. Along with the coins, ivory and gold ear plugs of the Kuṣāṇa period and mother goddesses in terracotta of the Mauryan and Śuṅga periods from our collection will highlight the lifestyle and cultic worship prevalent in the early historic periods. The terracotta mother goddesses are votive plaques, elaborately decorated with jewellery and drapery, typical of the Mauryan and Śuṅga styles. There is a capital of *śālabhañjikā*s from the Kuṣāṇa period probably used in a Buddhist monastery displayed in this section which reminds visitors of similar figures found on gateways such as those of the Sāñcī *stūpa*. They are a pair depicted on two sides, intertwining with foliage, as if the same vegetative sap was flowing through all of them. It seems to be of Kuṣāṇa period and style from a site in north-western part of India.

The opening section called "early beginnings" also refers to the inventions and innovations of the ancient Indians in the areas of Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine, Mineralogy, Arts, Architecture, Polity, Vedas and Aesthetics. One often forgets that India has a lot of scientific acumen that has received scant recognition globally, and I have tried to address it here by covering an extensive area of knowledge, wisdom and inquiry through this small but informative section. Unfortunately, there are no artefacts to substantiate this theme, so we use a multi-media kiosk to introduce the Indian

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scientific knowledge. The design for this scientific space is inspired by the *Rāma-yantra* of Jantar-Mantar in Delhi.

The collection of South Asia is well represented in stone sculpture mainly because they were relatively easy to collect and it offered a vast selection possibility for the range of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain iconography. Most collection was meant for display and this was an essential criterion for collection. We hardly have a study collection or a collection of multiples. The selection criteria often dealt with chronological periods, i.e., (1) Mauryan, Kuṣāṇa, Gupta, Pāla, medieval central India (under which many sub-styles are subsumed) which enabled us to collect some iconographically and stylistically representative key artefacts; (2) Iconographical attributes such as Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, Gāṇapatya, Saurya, Jain, Buddhist, etc., which enabled us to explore the divine personalities and myths related to various gods; (3) architectural styles such as Nāgara, Vesara and Draviḍa styles that could be represented with architectural fragments to clearly create a contextual display and not a superficially pleasing decor.

There is a very basic introduction that offers an insight into the multiplicity or the polytheistic aspect of Hinduism, its philosophies, and their interpretations by the *ācārya*s and the rituals or festivals associated with each of the sectarian beliefs and practices. For example for Vaiṣṇavism, we display figures of Caturbhuja Viṣṇu and Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu from Madhya Pradesh, refer to Śrīvaiṣṇava and Pushtimargi philosophies of Ramanuja and Vallabha as examples of Vaiṣṇava cults as well as include a short video to focus on how Kṛṣṇa's birthday, Janmāṣṭamī is celebrated in Singapore. This is a holistic approach as against narrowly chronological or iconographical or purely art historical. For Buddhism, the focus is on the Life of Buddha and the spread of Buddhism. We develop the exposition on this theme with very few but representative artefacts such as a narrative panel from Gāndhāra region depicting Buddha's *mahābhiniṣkramaṇa*, his meditation and enlightenment. We have also tried to collect Sri Lankan Buddhist material for this section, although it is rather difficult to collect. Drawing on stylistic similarities we could build links and interactions between regions and demonstrate that with actual examples. There is also scope for exploring Tibetan Buddhism and the artefacts used for rituals, with a view to highlight the role of practical religion and the making of artistic ritual objects. In this we have a parallel display of Hindu and Buddhist ritual objects and an opportunity to focus on non-iconic, contextual material with high artistic value. Some fine sculptures in stone especially the dated Kuṣāṇa (97 CE) seated Buddha in *abhaya-hasta*, a Pāla stone Akṣobhya (eleventh century), a Sena bronze Lokeśvara (twelfth century) are the highlights of the Buddhist collection (*Pls.* 118 & 119). We have a small collection of Jain and Buddhist materials, but we hope to augment this collection in future.

Many central Indian sculptures of the post-Gupta period from about the eighth century up until the twelfth century were collected from the architectural perspective to reflect upon the complexity of the medieval culture, philosophy and politics in northern India. A reflection of this complexity is alluded to in the medieval temple wall built to emulate the exterior of a Nāgara temple on which

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fragments of niche and pilaster sculptures are displayed. The wall has articulation and rhythm in arrangement of its planes, which echoes the *maṇḍovara* of a Nāgara temple. There is a large sculpture of a Devi or a Yoginī from Brijamaṇḍal in Vidiśā district of the Paramāra period on loan from the Government of India on display here along with twelfth-century images *of apsarā-devāṅganā*s, *vyāla*, Cāmuṇḍā and dancing Gaṇeśa (*Pl.* 120). Unique to this section are a South Indian stone spout of *circa* twelfth century, a lion surmount from the *śukanāsā* of a Nāgara temple from Madhya Pradesh and a lintel from a Durgā temple of mid-ninth century. The lintel is displayed at actual height of about 6 feet from the ground on a doorframe with *dvāraśākhā*s and a threshold below to contextualise the two temple door related architectural fragments. The spout although very bulky is displayed from a wall at the height of the *adhiṣṭhāna*, a rather unusual artefact to be found in most museums.

Let us now deliberate on a very extensive collection area and thematic section of the gallery. The usual definition of South India from the Singaporean context was found rather limiting. It mostly referred to Tamil Hindus but that I perceived that as too general and so consciously explored Telugu and Malabar regions, as there is a sizeable population of south Indian Muslims speaking Tamil, Telugu and Malayālam in Singapore[20] who migrated here in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, there are not many artefacts to display and talk about this community although we hope to collect some material in future. In the same context, reference to Christians has also been rather minimal, although in future, some collection and research will be focused on this community of Indians. I have also explored the synthesis of village gods and folk cults within the Indian Hindu communities living in Singapore today, which in my view captures the essence of the Hindu community in Singapore. Thus, by drawing parallels, I have tried to bridge tradition and modernity, ancient and contemporary, Indian and Singaporean multiculturalism. Multiculturalism *per se* in India and Singapore have very culture specific meanings compared with what west denominates as multiculturalism. For India it is underlined by diversity based on geo-political considerations of politics, language, religion, food and lifestyle within different geographic regions of the subcontinent even though racially and ethnically all are called Indians. Whereas for Singapore, the multiculturalism pervades major ethnic groups found here since last century, Chinese, Malaya, Indian and others, which constitute and monolithic attribution and generalisation of inter-ethnic identities.

The South Indian collection aimed to collect some high quality Coḷa sculptures including bronzes but also attempted to acquire humble ritual objects and village sculptures. There was no hypocritical double standard about high and low art or mainstream classical art and culture being represented here but a democratic semblance of the reality within the existing Indian society. There are stone and bronze images of Subrahmaṇya, Brahmā, Bhairava and Aiyenar in granite of the Coḷa period and bronze images of Somaskanda, Hanumān, Sambandar or Dancing Kṛṣṇa of late Coḷa and Vijayanagara periods in the collection. Focusing on aspects of cultural anthropology of South Indians especially through the gamut presented by associating with festivals, rituals and religious life of South Indians in Singapore seemed feasible. This was not an academic art historical approach but

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encompassed anthropological methodology and lateral thinking. We soon plunged headlong into documenting the popular festivals of *Thaipusam* and *Theemithi* in Singapore which are recognized as national Indian festivals in Singapore.[21] In both these festivals, the journey from home to temple is rather arduous; it involves grit and self-discipline but a passage, a spiritually evolving journey, which is what triggered me to explore the analogy to exhibit the display. Based on documentation of the festivals in Singapore and South India, to evoke the experience of visiting an Indian temple town such as Madurai, Vārāṇasī or Śrīraṅgam, I came up with a concept of a "journey" from "home to temple" as an overarching theme for display. This umbrella theme encompasses the range of artefacts that would evoke sights, sounds and experiences of visiting above-mentioned cities. Some highlights of this collection are wooden *vāhana*s of Yali, peacock, Nandī and Garuḍa and numerous ritual objects used in Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples in India and Singapore. These are very large and realistic polychrome painted animal and bird forms on which deities are anchored and taken around the temple courtyard on special festivals such as *brahmotsava*. The *vāhana*s and temple *ther* — chariot sculptures are also juxtaposed with a large Beṅgālī palanquin. This semiotic juxtaposition not only contrasts the role of a vehicle used for the divine and the human beings but also emphasizes the very fact that the idea of the conveyance (for a journey) refers to the status and its sociological perceptions of their users.

A satellite to the journey from "home to temple" (*Pls.* 114 & 115) theme is a temple textile painting display with ritual functions inter-linking ritual, sectarian festival calendar or cosmological connotations dating from the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. These paintings on cotton come from different regions including Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. A scroll from Rajasthan depicts a visit by a Jain monk while *picchavāi* of Śrīnāthjī from Koṭā, Jaipur and Deccan elaborate the Śrīnāthjī cult according to the Puṣṭimārgīs of the Vallabha *sampradāya* including a topographical view of Śrīnāthjī temple in Nāthadwārā. The Deccani *picchavai* is typically depicted with a *kadamba* tree in the centre surrounded by *gopī*s in gold and silver on a dark background while the Koṭā *picchavāi* shows Kṛṣṇa wearing *kaupīnam*, for a *maṅgala darśana*. It is an unusual *picchavāi*, which is very dark, blends the early morning view of the hilly region with the dark blue complexion of Kṛṣṇa himself. A very rare cloth painting in Basohli style documenting a *śrāddha* ceremony is one of our unique textiles, which I had researched upon very carefully. It has a schematic composition representing multiple shrines to Śiva including the *jyotirliṅga*s and Kāśī Viśveśvara and inscriptions referring to many sites in Gayā. There is a strong possibility that the painting was commissioned for a patron in the Himachal region commemorating a *śrāddha* ceremony.

We have acquired a large group of *kalamkārī* paintings depicting Durgā, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Kṛṣṇalīlā* of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These are very narrative in nature and help to uncover the myth in a comic strip manner. There are Andhra and Tamil versions, and one could see the stylistic differences among them. A rare painted cotton scroll of Telaṅgānā region in Andhra Pradesh depicts the life history of Kunepullalu community, a sub-caste of the *śālā* weavers, that is about 30 m long

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and unfolds very interesting representations of Gaṇeśa, Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu and mythic composite bird Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa. The closeness to Lepākṣī murals is very clear although this scroll is of a later date, probably late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and shows great narrative method. The scroll painters narrate the story with dance and music dealing mostly with the story of Bhavana *ṛṣi*, their legendary progenitor.

The theme of performing arts and temple is rather uniquely interlinked which on one level defines the *garbhagṛha*, sanctum like space[22] as well as the final culmination of the "journey" through the *maṇḍapam* or a pillared hall.[23] On another level, the sanctum, pillared hall or the courtyard of a temple were traditionally used for dance and music, as they were performed as a form of worship in many ancient temples all over India. It is this context that we have tried to evoke here. Two large nineteenth-century polychrome painted figures of *devadāsīs*,[24] one holding the *sundarī* gesture and the other keeping the *tāla* beat adorn this section of the gallery where we unfold the theme of *devadāsīs* connected with temple worship, Dāsīaṭṭam, the form of dance they performed and its evolution in the contemporary Bharatanāṭyam. This dance form is very popular in India and Singapore; thus its reference in the gallery is relevant. A *catūrmukha liṅgam* in terracotta of the seventh-eighth centuries and a bronze nineteenth-century *gaumukha* surrounded by Coḷa bronzes adorn the sanctum area. We have twelfth-century Coḷa bronzes of Somaskanda, Hanumān, dancing Bāla Kṛṣṇa or Sambandar, standing Gaṇeśa and ritual temple jewellery (eighteenth century) used for decorating the deity displayed on the walls of this gallery for further contextualization of the sanctum. This sanctum like space will evoke a sense of timelessness and eternity — a spiritually uplifting experience.

The concept of the later medieval India is further explored with its roots in the synthesis of Hindu-Muslim cultures, Rājpūt history and Deccan Sultanates culminating in the Colonial period with the advent of the Europeans to India (*Pls.* 116 & 117). This is another umbrella theme under which smaller thematic groups of Mughal textiles, Mughal and Rājpūt architecture, decorative arts and paintings have been displayed. The cultural and artistic basis of the synthesis of Hindu — Rājpūt and Mughal-Islamic and further enriched by Sikh, Marāṭhā and European elements which contributed to the entire Mughal period and post-Mughal styles which continue even as late as the early twentieth century particularly in art and architecture. One of the major highlights of this gallery is a 3.65 m tall gateway from Vṛja area in Uttar Pradesh that formed a façade of a nobleman's house, in a post Shah Jahan period (late seventeenth-early eighteenth century) vernacular style.[25] Its vernacular flavour comes from its more rustic and casual rendering of the vases and creepers besides an overtly Hindu design vocabulary. The gallery is designed with symmetry and balance echoed by two parallel rows of arches leading up to a eighteenth century Mughal or Rājpūt velvet and gold leaf tent panel[26] placed behind a cotton and silk eighteenth-century summer carpet. The ethos of Islamic colonnaded structure in the form of arched corridor helps to bind the room into an intimate space further echoing the dichotomy of public and private spaces, interior and exteriors and importance of weather specific architecture. This section will explore very briefly themes of *bhakti*, Sufism and

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Sikhism as salient phenomena of the fifteenth century, which led to many changes in social and cultural contexts. This theme will also link to the Muslim and Sikh Diaspora in Singapore today and how they trace their roots while integrating themselves into the multicultural society of Singapore today.

As a finale to the "journey," I perceive a strong sense of historical relevance to link the display with Singapore today by referring back to the pioneering Indians. Even sepia images of Chettiar moneylenders, snake charmers, *kavadi* bearers and itinerant dancers and musicians will appear in this section dealing with the theme of colonialism (nineteenth century). The diachronic and synchronic "journey" experience will come full circle with familiar scenes of Singapore in not so distant past with which many of our older visitors will relate. Whereas for the younger ones, it will be a "journey," hitherto unexplored.

**References**


1. The National Museum began as the Raffles Museum and Library in 1887 and became the National Museum in1960 and was directly under the former Ministry of Culture, which is now the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts. See Gretchen Liu, *One Hundred Years of the National Museum*, Singapore, 1887-1987, 1987.
2. *Straits Times*, January, 1992, p. 4.
3. NHB was formed by an Act of Parliament.
4. Singapore Government Press Release, release no. 34/JAN. Speech by BG(RES) George Yeo, minister for Information and the arts and second minister for Foreign Affairs, at the opening of the *'Gems of Chinese Art'* exhibition on 31 January, 1992 at 11 a.m. at the Empress Place Building.
5. See Museum Precinct Master Plan, Architectural Concept Brief, National Museum, Singapore by LORD Cultural Resources Planning & Management Inc., August, 1992.
6. By May 91, a concept paper on *'Structure and Themes of the Museum of Asian Civilizations in the National Museum Precinct'* was drafted by Mr. C.G. Kwa, the then Director of the National Museum incorporating ideas and revisions of the then Minister (BG) George Yeo.
7. Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819 as the representative of the East India Company and Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen, Sumatra. He is generally believed to be the 'Father of the Nation' who spearheaded the development of Singapore as a entreport for trade. Also see Lieu, 1987, pp. 15, 62 and Singapore: *Journey into Nationhood*, 1998, p. 13.
8. C.G. Kwa, *Interpretative Exhibits on Asian Civilizations and Cultures*, File 24.46 v 1, National Archives, Singapore, Microfilm collection.
9. *Ibid.*
10. S. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore*, Oxford University Press, Institute of Race Relations, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, p. 1.
11. *Singapore Population, Census 2000*, www.singstat.gov.sg.
12. Proposed Structure of Presentation for Seeking Sponsorship for ACM (South Asia) by the then Senior Curator Kenson Kwok, and Development Paper on Acquisition, Annex-39 to 50 (unpublished).
13. For a more extensive insight into the South Asia gallery and audience development see an earlier article by Dr. Kenson Kwok, Director, ACM, *India in Singapore: Exhibitions & the Development of Audiences*


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*& Collections at the Asian Civilizations Museum*, written for Millennia of India in Asia, Bangkok, August 2000 (unpublished). For more insight into the set-up of the ACM see Kenson Kwok, The New Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore Archiv fur Volerkunde, 50 (1999) pp. 163-69 as well as by Kenson Kwok Old buildings to new museums: the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore, Museum and Architecture — Towards a New Museum (Proceedings of the Forum for Museum Directors), National Museum of History, Taiwan (2000).

14. *Alaṅkāra: 5000 Years of India*, essays by R.C. Sharma, Jagdish Mittal, Ratan Parimoo and C.G. Kwa, National Heritage Board, and Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd. Singapore, India, 1994 .
15. *Rāmāyaṇa: A Living Tradition*, Gauri Parimoo Krishnan, Tan Huism, T.K. Biswas, Sarla Chopra, National Heritage Board, Singapore, 1997.
16. The Saffron Revolution, Edward Luce, *FT Weekend*, 4 May/5 May 2002, p. XIII.
17. In the past when this building was an Immigration Office and a Treasury, there were two special strong rooms or vaults. One of these has been converted by us as a Sanctum space by retaining the iron grill and a strong metal door crafted by Chatswood, makers of Safes to the King George VI and to the Bank of England from Shrewsbury, England.
18. I like to make two remarks in honour of Professor Parimoo and the teachers and former colleagues whose training and interaction at the department of Art History in Baroda has enabled me to explore many new avenues, where my skills as well as knowledge could be applied and it has really helped me to mature. I hasten to mention and it is appropriate to do so, that one of Professor Parimoo's research concerns on iconometry actually helped me and my designer to arrive at a very successful design solution after many months of struggle. This 'medieval temple wall' I see as a link to the seminal work done by him that served as a starting point, guiding us and leading us on a successful curatorial and technical research. (Author)
19. Klaus Klostermaier, "Questioning the Āryan Invasion Theory and Revising Ancient Indian History," *Journal of Indian Council of Historical Research*, Special Issue, June 2001, pp. 63-77.
20. There are about 150,184 Tamils in Singapore while 21,736 Malayālīs. Statistics Department does not mention the Telegus but I am sure their number is quite sizeable. Among the Indians, there are about 55.4 per cent Hindus while 25.6 per cent Muslims and 12.1 per cent Christians. Other religions comprise of 6.3 per cent. A small percentage of Indian Muslims includes Khojas and Bohras from western India.
21. Refer to "Following Murukan: Tai Pucam in Singapore" by Gauri Parimoo Krishnan, http://murugan.org/research/gauri_krishnan.htm, unpublished paper on firewalking 'Theemithi — Re-enacting the Great Ritual-Drama honoring Draupadiamman at Singapore' by Gauri Parimoo Krishnan presented at the International Conference on Art & Religion, Chidambaram in 2001.
22. It used to be a treasury vault when the Empress Place building was an administrative office.
23. Two specially commissioned pillars in Coḷa style with *hāṇḍī* lamps and woodcarvings set the decor of this space.
24. See article on these figures by Chung May Khuen in *Arts of Asia*, Nov-Dec 2002 issue (forthcoming).
25. In consultation with Dr. R. Nath, Agra, who commented and wrote a note, based on a photograph of the gateway during my recent visit to Agra in December, 2001.
26. A Similar piece of carpet in Victoria and Albert Museum, London, see *Arts of India: 1550-1900*, ed. John Guy and Deborah Swallow, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1990, p. 102.

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# 32

# The Photograph on a Rowdysheet

*R Srivatsan*

The "Rowdysheet" is a record that police stations in the cities and towns of Andhra Pradesh maintain of a rowdy.[1] While the term "rowdy" is often used in Telugu film titles, the document called the "rowdysheet" and the term "rowdysheeter" seem to be specific to the police procedures of Andhra Pradesh.[2] It is almost certain that the police in other towns and cities too, would have some document, perhaps with a different name, that performs the same function. This is because the offences that are covered by this document seem not to be specific to any one region: eve-teasing, "goondaism," terrorising *sara* shopowners, street hawkers, prostitutes, and collecting *mamool* from them.[3] A man who commits any of these "petty" offences is likely to have a rowdysheet initiated and maintained in his name.[4] The strong arm of a gang which illegally acquires land by forcible means (an activity called land-grabbing) would be a "rowdysheeter" almost by definition. More serious offences such as beating a person up, attacking someone with a knife, participating in riot — communal or otherwise — and endangering persons at places of amusement, meeting or assembly are also grounds for initiating a rowdysheet in the name of the offender. Policemen and journalists who cover urban crime, state unequivocally in conversations off record that rowdysheeters rarely belong to the upper castes or privileged classes. According to them, a rowdysheeter is a man who either belongs to the Scheduled Castes, the Backward Classes, or is often a Muslim; and almost by definition, he is of a socio-economic class which finds residence in a *basti* or slum.

The existence of a rowdysheet in the name of a man implies that he will undergo experiences that are calculated to humiliate and subjugate him. He will be made an object of surveillance and will be subjected to the unrestrained force of police methods. His movements will be tracked with regularity and his activity or passivity in the social milieu will be recorded. Depending on the police's perception of his virulence, he may be forced to report at the police station each evening and give a report of his activities and whereabouts. Some of these visits serve as occasions for his "passivation" through a police "examination."

A photograph of the rowdy is pasted on the first page of the document, along with details of identification: name, father's name, caste or community, the list of his associates and the observed instances of their association and the reasons for which the rowdysheet was initiated. This is a

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"passport" photograph, in black and white, about two inches high and an inch and a half wide with a "lustre" finish, taken at the local photo studio which usually specialises in these insipid images. One of the six rowdysheets examined by us did not have a picture.[5] The photographed individuals did not seem to be very different from those seen in application forms, passports, driving licenses, and so on, except for one detail — in photographs stuck on passports the male subject usually would be wearing a suit. The reader could well imagine that in the intimidating circumstances under which the rowdy is photographed for the document, it is unlikely that he would be formally dressed.

The *Andhra Pradesh Police Manual* does not prescribe that a photograph be pasted on the rowdysheet.[6] However, in another format for hardened criminals called the "history sheet," the manual does ask for many pictures — left and right profile, full face, head and shoulders, full length, and so on. When we asked the police inspectors and journalists whom we interviewed about the differences between the history sheet and the rowdysheet, the responses we got seemed to collapse them completely. These responses, and the range of offences recorded on the six rowdysheets we saw, made it apparent that the two types of police records did not exhibit any difference in practical use both followed the format prescribed for the rowdysheet. It seems as if the history sheet format, which is a cumbersome apparatus with nine pages of detailed information, is often replaced by that of the rowdysheet which is simpler, and is flexible enough to accommodate detail when required. However, we could not ascertain when the practice of pasting the photograph on the rowdysheet was started because the policemen who cooperated with us did not say more than that the photographs were being used "since a long time."

The central question that I explore relates to the function of the photograph on the rowdysheet: What are the different modes in which the photograph works? How does it interact with the written information on the sheet? What is its give and take with the police institution? Finally, how does it operate in relation to its different viewers: the police who see it in the course of their daily duty, occasional viewers who see it under exceptional circumstances; and the rowdy himself, who in all likelihood cannot see his own photograph on the sheet, but whose life is mapped and characterized by its presence as part of a document that writes his story.

## Identity

The most direct function that comes to mind when we think of the rowdysheet photograph is identification. "This is Yellaiah," is an almost tautological identity where the two sides of the word "is" are expressed as equivalent: rowdy = Yellaiah. The picture is Yellaiah himself, we do not stop to say that this is the picture of a man, and that the man we recognize from this picture is Yellaiah. The photograph brings him to us by presenting his identity. This formulation would perhaps make more

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sense to the reader if I contrast the way in which the photograph is used on the rowdysheet, with the way in which the police manual prescribes its use on the history sheet. On the history sheet, the photograph is intended as a visual supplement to the verbal description which is carefully itemised: Does the subject have high cheekbones, sunken eyes, a domed forehead? Does he suffer any physical deformity that would serve as identification? Does he limp, stoop or swagger? What are the indelible marks he carries on his body? Are there birthmarks, moles, patches on the body which prove that he is the person the law names? Clearly, in the design of the history sheet format, the photograph establishing the identity of the criminal is subordinate to detailed textual characterisation. In contrast to this, the rowdysheet dispenses with the visible aspects of identification and carries a passport photograph instead. It is almost as if the photograph on the rowdysheet has gained confidence in itself and has usurped the supreme role of identification from a writing which describes the marks of identity on the history sheet. It may seem that there is not much difference: the reader may argue that the written description was a mark of identification seen by the police and recorded as faithfully as possible: with the photograph, the eye has simply become mechanical, and the writing has become a chemical trace. Thus, the photograph has eliminated the human organs of the witness/writer, prone to error, illegitimate compassion and betrayal, and replaced them with an objective mechanism of recording. More precisely, the human activity of recording has been limited to framing the picture to be taken and pressing the shutter release to initiate the photochemical conversion of the paper's surface. This, the reader may argue, makes for a better record of objective truth than the written word which affords the writer an infinite number of chances to alter the shade of truth at almost any time during the recording.

The displacement of the written identification by the photograph, however, has more to it than just a mechanical or chemical "improvement." In the history sheet format, the written record in which the unique signs of identity were described in response to a sequence of questions on the form, meant in turn that the offender was identified by a systematic examination of the sites of the body named on the sheet as displaying the mark. Recognition emerged as a certainty when all the identifying signs on the body tallied with their description on the form. Thus, identity was established through a correspondence between the descriptions on the document and the signs recorded on the body itself. The photographs of different views and parts of the body simply had to illustrate the written descriptions. With the photograph on the rowdysheet, this slow process of questioning (does the suspect have a mole on the right wrist?) is superseded by immediate recognition (it is him — Yellaiah!). While the written description dispersed the identity of the offender in words and categorizations that composed it, the photograph crystallizes that identity in a visible representation that does away with the linguistic process. The photograph, therefore, makes present; it does so by capturing the rowdy in a human image; and if the man can be captured for as innocuous a requirement as having his photograph taken, surely he can be even more easily captured when the law wants him in earnest!

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The photograph, better than writing in a language, produces a visible and recognisable entity as the author of a list of disorders. The photograph brings a lustrous finish to the rowdysheet's prime function: the demarcation of social unrest as originating in specific individuals. Order, in the irresistible perspective we inherit from the British rule, can be envisioned only if disorder be individualized and safely contained (indeed, as Foucault says, even produced?) within a manageable grid of information.[8] The tables on the rowdysheet recording social unrest in a language which grounds it in the individual are, in form, if not in exact detail, a colonial legacy; the rowdysheet is an instrument to realise Order. For the law, the rowdysheeter represents the disorder of society; he is the productive node at which the coercive institutions of the state apply an intolerable pressure on the social body. The rowdysheet is a mechanism designed to get a hold on the slippery, amorphous disorder that characterizes the lives of the underprivileged.[9] It functions by pinning down the name of an individual as that disorder's focus. The picture identifying the rowdy on the sheet, providing a recognizable image to which the traces of writing will adhere, is a representation of his disorderly presence.

When seen from a semiotic perspective, the rowdysheet, with its descriptions and details, signals the state's intent to control unruly individuals. It (along with the police practice that surrounds its use) is a sign of the state's will to order. Once a rowdysheet is initiated, it can be terminated only under the signature of a Deputy Commissioner of Police; the material record of the disorder is like a stubborn scar that refuses to go away. While it functions as a signifier and instrument of order, however, it also acts an embedded pointer that underscores the legitimacy of the photograph. It is a pointer because it does not say directly that the photograph is a recorder of truth, it implies it in its use; embedded, because outside the police institutions within which it functions, the rowdysheet is nothing. Its terror emerges only in the juxtaposition of its daylit scrupulousness against the nocturnal viciousness of third-degree methods, and the writing on the sheet gets its sterile and ascetic edge only from the routine and dulling abuse addressed to the rowdy, or used in reference to him when he figures in conversation between policemen. The police practice of using the photograph on the rowdysheet results in an increase of the picture's value and prestige: When the law itself with its authority is willing to depend so implicitly on the truth of the photograph; "lesser personalities" too would find their objectives more than satisfied by the photograph's veracity. However, if the reader examines the frequency with which diverse institutions require an individual's identity to be represented in a passport-size photograph, she can see that the photograph's legitimacy is neither just a matter of personal satisfaction, nor even just a result of institutional enforcement; it is simultaneously a naturalised attribute of photography itself.

Roland Barthes recognized that the camera had a remarkable ability to state the truth about the appearance of a person or a thing by direct analogy to "reality," without the use of a system of codes

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(i.e., a language).[10] He saw that this purely denotative status of the photograph was in all probability mythical: devolving from an ideological base.[11] I would like to stress this point and inflect it here by saying that the photograph itself is a sign, and has a history that guarantees its denotative status. Its characteristic of truthfulness is in a large part, a historical one, and is a sedimented result of its use in many forms of document and modes of discourse, all of which constitute the history of the photograph's association with diverse domains of knowledge. The rowdysheet is one such document which generates the knowledge of the "coarse" individual of an "other" world. Photography's legitimacy is strengthened as it is put to a new use by the law.

It may be remarked based on the preceding discussion that the full emergence of photography as a discourse "without" a language — as a prose of the world — is clearly not an instantaneous, immediate transformation. It is a slow process, taking its time to grow, spreading its regime of truth unevenly and in a heterogeneous fashion, mediated by its institutional base.

**Interpellation**

Between the photograph on the rowdysheet and that on the passport is a gap which is neither large nor small because it marks both an identity and a difference. Formally, the two kinds of photograph and some of the proximate textual matter are identical in that they both identify an individual. However, the divergent discourses they participate in and the different institutions that use them; inform this similarity with a difference. It is obviously not enough to say that the visa record on a passport which lists the different countries which have granted entry to the visa holder is formally similar to the rowdysheet's list of disciplinary actions that are taken to tame a rowdy. One is a permit which marks a privilege that grants access to the fabled wealth of the west. The other marks a restriction, a withdrawal of the privilege to enter an area: the externment order issued by the Commissioner of Police, Andhra Pradesh, banning the rowdysheeter from entering the city for a period of time; it could also record a loss of freedom through a forceful command that the rowdy reports to the police station at regular intervals. A refused visa (or even the prospect of refusal) is analogous to an externment order, in this sense the visa marks an ambivalent social location from which a (typically Third World) subject may either be allowed to proceed or refused permission. This ambivalence is multiplied when passport holders like "us" gaze on that rare occasion at the photograph on the rowdysheet itself, or (more commonly) encounter its weak, reflected image on the crime page of the newspapers which announce "Notorious Rowdysheeter Yellaiah Shot Dead."

As my collaborator and I are shown the rowdysheets, we are disturbed. Liminally, the formal similarity between the passport photograph and the picture on the rowdysheet signals the fragility of the wall that separates us from the rowdysheeter. Our confidence in ourselves subverted by this representation of our shared humanity, we hastily deploy a common sense history. We anchor Yellaiah's photographic image with the identity fabricated on the sheet: his caste/community, father's

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name, his specialized rowdiness, the chronological sequence of his offences as per the relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, or the Hyderabad City Police Rules, the warnings issued and the reports of surveillance. Our knowledge of the object Yellaiah is synthesised from his photograph and the written traces which have constructed his identity over a period of time. We perceive this object to inhabit, and thereby to mark, the outside of the law. Simultaneously, we — the (uncritical and unreflective, in short "natural") subjects of the law — layer and burnish our own identities as well as we can, with a privileged secularism, polish, lawfulness, and with a certificate of outstanding character, all of which emerge with rowdysheeter Yellaiah as a visible counterpoint. Speaking to the police inspector, we regain our composure, and realise that he will never refer to us with the vile abuse he reserves for Yellaiah; that he will respect us instead for our class and style. And he will cherish the wisdom, understanding and finesse with which we accommodate his Muslimness. We see our feeble, yet strangely powerful, social status confirmed in our observation that while we cannot but feel a twinge of insecurity and fear, the same is true of the police inspector in front of us: each of us fears the rowdy Yellaiah, but at the same time exults vicariously and silently in his capture and subjection in the photographic image.

Our individuality is reproduced in this interpellant drama through a fear of losing whatever identity we think we possess, along with the special difference that we believe constitutes it. Perhaps, neither this interpellation, nor the possibility of our conceptualizing it here would have been possible in the absence of the photograph and of the rowdysheet on which it is pasted — or if the civilization which has colonised our vision through these gifts had taken a different turn. It must also be remembered that this drama is entirely dependent on our social locations: upper caste, middle class and masculine. Interviews with Dalit women, men and "rowdies themselves" show that the social relationship to rowdyism in the subalterm milieu is often more complicated than the one just described between the investigators and the rowdysheet.

Finally, the form of the passport photograph, its technical attributes and its relationship with the law, all manoeuvre into new positions with the instant-multiple-colour passport photographic camera which generates four, even six, instant colour images in the same exposure. "Instant" makes it "more truthful" and makes the touching up of blemishes impossible. Colour makes it more accurate because one more identifying characteristic, flesh tint, becomes evident. Obviously the rarity of this new form makes it a costlier option for American visa seekers who forgot their homework, rather than for an impoverished city police station trying to maintain its slipping hold on a menacing populace. Presumably as our carceral institutions[12] begin to conserve the wealth, and the "health," of the nation more effectively and visibly, and they are already, judging from the state's expenditure on the repressive apparatus in general — the patrol vans, jeeps and motorcycles — they too will begin to use their own polaroid cameras and amateur photographers, thus drawing a curtain across the unstable, dangerous photographic event which has one extra, supplementary, witness: the local

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photographer. I would urge the reader to imagine this germinal event.

> The set is a dinghy studio: dirty, tattered curtains behind a laminated counter with works of distinction by the great master arranged beneath the glass countertop. A shelf on the wall supports a ten by twelve picture of an almost too voluptuous woman, perhaps unaware of the boldness of her stance and the revealing drape of her saree. At the other end of the shelf rests a tin frame holding a portrait of a couple with rouge on their cheeks, obviously touched up on the print. The woman wears a bindi and both have satisfied, fruity smiles on their faces. The master, skinny, wearing brown rimmed spectacles, a moustache, a terylene shirt and polyester trousers, greets the policemen when they arrive, and eyes the rowdy. He leads them into the studio without a word, stubbing his cigarette out off the threadbare carpet rolled out some time during a happier, more prosperous past. The staleness of a hundred stubs assails the nostrils. The rowdy, seeing the mirror on the wall, goes towards it. Drawing the comb out of his pocket with a practised flourish, he shapes his hair into a stylish "buff." He admires his face, casting a furtive glance at the reflection of the constables, who order him to hurry up-or else! As he nonchalantly sits on the bench, the photographer goes up to him, sets his shoulders at an angle, turns his chin up and pats his hair down. The rowdy protests, breaks the pose he is cast in and ruffles his hair back up. The photographer adjusts the rowdy's shoulders again and goes over to his ageing Rolleiflex on a rickety tripod. He winds the film and cocks the shutter, looks down at the mirror, and focuses. He remembers that the man had paid him a visit once in order to collect *mamool*, and had gone away wordlessly when he refused. Suddenly nervous and hoping that the rowdy does not remember the event, he switches on the lights. The subject has shifted again. The photographer sighs, turns down the lights and begins to go back to the rowdy, who orders him roughly to take the picture as he is. Muttered threats from the policemen. The photographer shrugs, turns up the lights saying, "Ismail Pilease." He releases the shutter and the camera captures the suddenly grim, tense and muscled boy, "young and active," who refuses to smile.[13]

As they walk out, one of the constables tries to take the rowdy roughly by the arm, but the latter jerks out of reach and glares at him — a clear threat in his eyes. The policeman pacifies him and walks uneasily by his side, suddenly worried about his daughter, who has to walk to school across the pan shop which is the rowdy's haunt. She has just passed class nine and "grew up" last month. For the first time, he begins to think of her marriage and worry knits his brow. Paradoxically, he cannot but, in the same chain of thought, admire the handsome devil beside him. His companion,

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the head constable, stays back to pay and collect the receipt. The photographer looks at him with surprise, unable to hide his relief. He learns that the boy was having a photo taken for the rowdysheet — that the petty offence was eve-teasing, and that there was also the suspicion that he was involved in a case of abduction and rape. The photographer too is struck by a sudden anxiety, and casts a fearful glance at the picture of the woman on the shelf, wishing she wasn't so brazen (though she did look pretty sexy in the photograph!). He makes a mental note to cuff her when he gets home that evening. Women must be kept in place for their own safety — especially when they were too bold with their bodies. He curses as he remembers her increasing stubbornness and realizes that tackling her may not be that easy.

For ten wearying years the rowdysheet wore his photograph, patiently accumulating the scribbled observations, typewritten threats, and orders of externment and records of admonitions. Finally beside the ageing stamp of approval from the Deputy Commissioner of Police to initiate the sheet another appeared: permission to close the file. Both the Deputy Commissioner and the Circle Inspector had changed, the constables transferred and promoted, but the rowdy remained. The reason for closure of the sheet: "The rowdy is now married for a second time and has settled down to a job. He is no longer young and active. Permission requested to close the rowdysheet as the man is no longer a threat to law and order." Two days later, the rowdy arrives at the police station, a little heavier around the waist, a few graying hairs, the same "buff" a little smaller and showing signs of a receding hairline under it. He hears the good news and heaves a sigh of relief. No more midnight calls from the constables when they want to round up a few warm bodies. He turns, walks out of the door with a light step, and suddenly wheels back towards the corner of the room. He picks up the photograph thrown in the dustbin, smooths it and puts it carefully in his pocket, a bit of the old spirit flashing in his eyes. He will fix it in the old tin frame and put it up on the television. Proof to honoured guests that he too did have a worthy past.

## Notes

1. This paper is based on the material gathered for R. Srivatsan and Vivek Dhareshwar, 'Rowdysheeters: An Essay on Subalternity and Politics', paper presented at the Subaltern Studies Conference on 'Subalternity and Culture', Hyderabad, 8-10 January 1994. A more developed version 'Rowdysheeters: An Essay on Subalternity and Politics' appears in Subaltern Studies, vol. 9 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996). Reprinted from R. Srivatsan, *Conditions of Visibility: Writings on Photography in Contemporary India*, Stree, Calcutta, 2000.

   *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1981) defines a rowdy as a rowdy person, that is, one who exhibits coarse and boisterous behaviour.

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2. The word 'rowdy' is probably also used in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The genealogy of the term in this region needs to be explored, but Telugu films 'have many titles which used the word: *Police Rowdy, Rowdy Inspector, Rowdy Alludu* (*son-in-law*). In each, the word 'rowdy' which has a definite negative connotation, is joined with terms like inspector, son-in-law, which have an opposite charge. The predictable ambivalence that results from these titles suggests that the rowdy is not yet beyond redemption, and the wellworn storyline usually retrieves him and his latent goodness for society.
3. 'Eve-teasing' is a specifically Indian coinage for the kind of harassment of girls and women that is rampant in urban areas. Such harassment can range from relatively mild efforts to strike a conversation, to catcalls, wolf-whistles and even physical harassment that may, though rarely, culminate in rape. 'Goondaism' is an Indian-English word derived from the word 'goonda': muscleman or 'anti-social element'. Sara is the Telugu word for a locally distilled potent alcoholic brew drunk widely in the state. Mamool is the periodic collection of an amount of money for the safe occupation of a trading place that belongs neither to the giver nor the taker of mamool. It is a kind of informal tax levied for the permission given to carry out (an illegal) trade. Mamools can be collected by either a rowdy or by a policeman who allows a street hawker to continue hawking in a prohibited area. It could be safely said that small trade in the city survives because of the illegal 'corrupt' practice of mamool.
4. That the rowdy sheet implies a man as its referent is clear from the item of information required under the title 'Son of', rather than 'Father's name', which is found in some other police documents. The Inspector General of Police, *The Andhra Pradesh Police Manual*: Part II Annexure and Forms , Hyderabad Bulletin Press, Secunderabad, nd.
5. Vivek Dhareshwar and I interviewed a Deputy Police Commissioner on duty in the course of our fieldwork. The policeman was extremely cooperative and permitted us to observe at first hand the mode of police functioning. The rowdysheeters were shown to us on the assurance that we would not copy anything down or do anything to incriminate him or make his identity known.
6. *The Andhra Pradesh Police Manual*, pp. 1045-46.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 1043-44.
8. Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans Alan Sheridan Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977, concludes thus: in short, the carceral archipelago assures, in depths of the social body, the formation of delinquency on the basis of subtle illegalities, the overlapping of the latter by the former and the establishment of a specified criminality (301). By 'carceral archipelago' he means the formation of disciplinary institutions in the modern west. Perhaps what he says is, in some ways at least, relevant to our situation.
9. Partha Chatterjee's inflection of Foucault's argument in 'Secularism and Toleration', *Economic and Political Weekly* (9 July 1994): pp. 1768-76, is useful at this point. He argues that disciplinary structures in India are often in a situation of embattlement with recalcitrant forms of sovereignty. I would argue that the rowdysheet is a weapon that postcolonial processes of governmentality in India use to battle emerging forms of sovereignty by classifying them as instances of social disorder.
10. Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, p. 36.
11. *Ibid*, p. 19.
12. See n. 8.
13. 'Young and active, this man will bear watching', seems to be a routine phrase entered in the surveillance record on the rowdysheets we saw.

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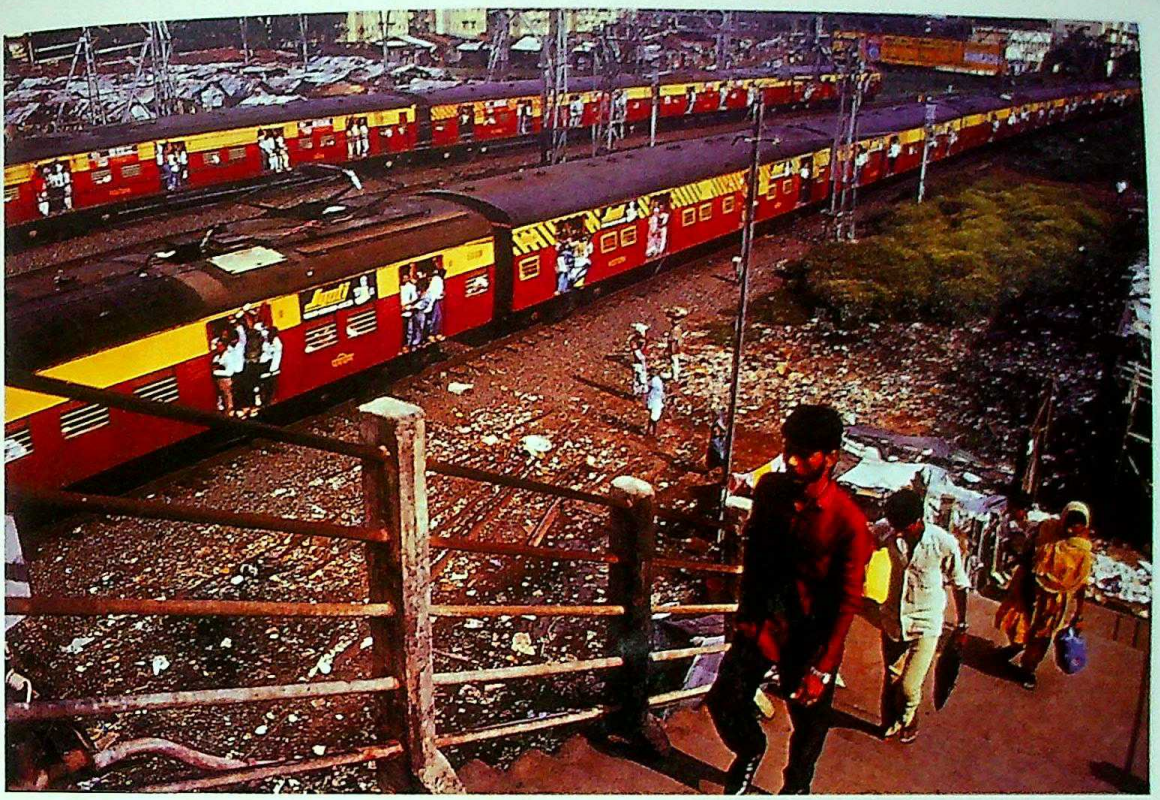
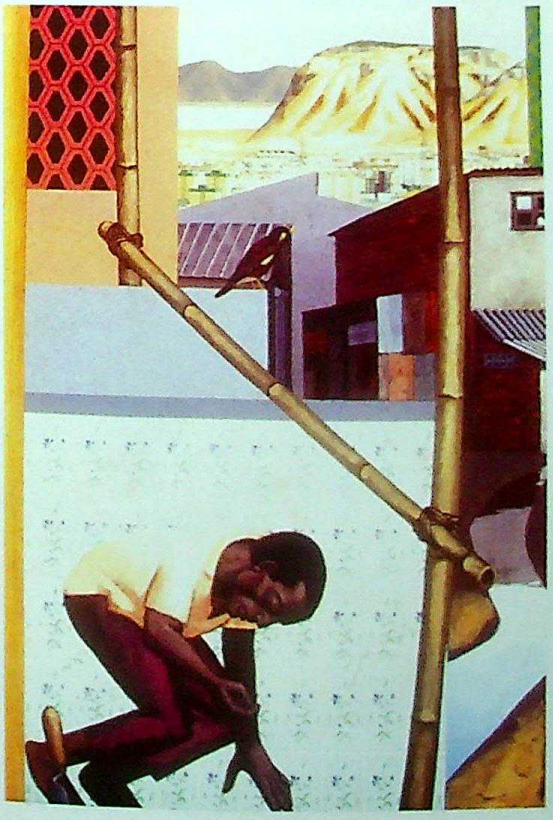


1. Raghubir Singh, From Bombay: Gateway to India, *Office Worker Leaves Home, Dharavi*, 1992.

2. Sudhir Patwardhan, *Fall*, 1998. Oil on canvas.



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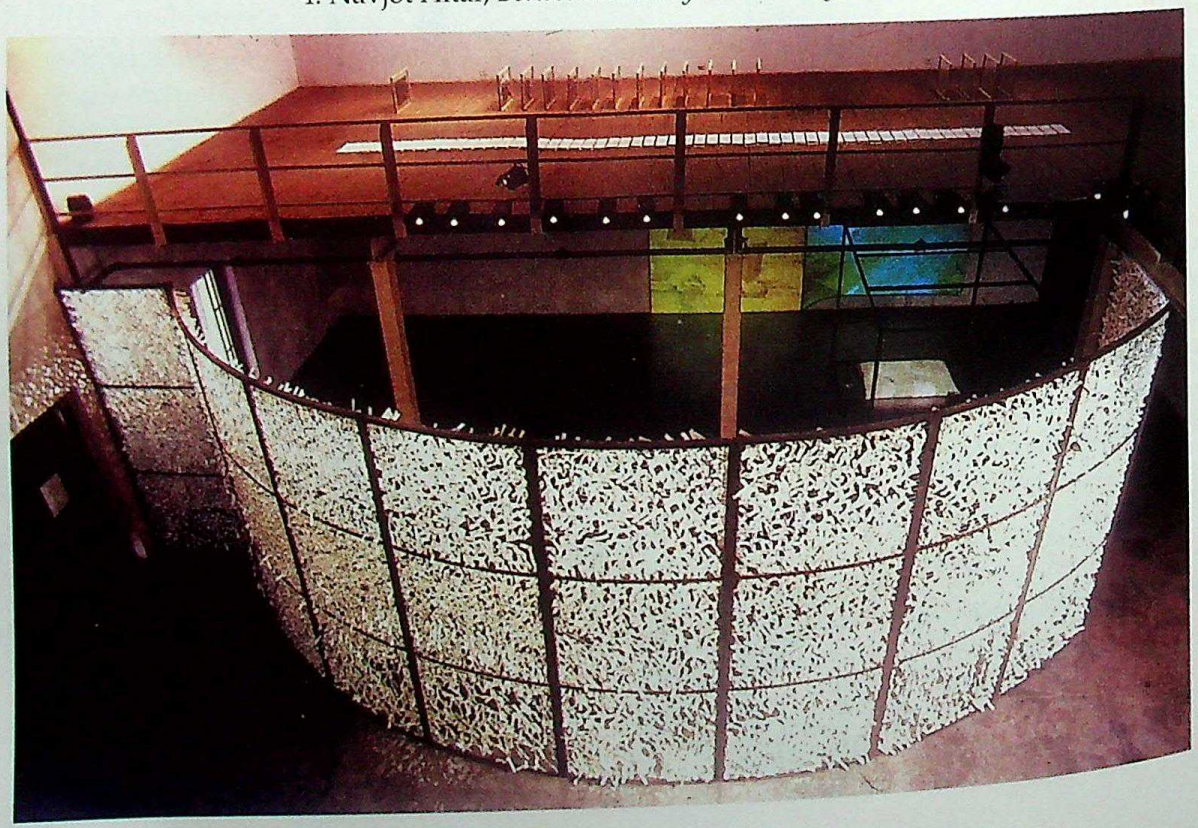
3. Atul Dodiya, *Missing*, 2000. Enamel paint on metal roller shutters and laminate boards.

4. Navjot Altaf, *Between Memory and History*, 2001.



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5. Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine*, 2000.

6. Pushpamala N., From *Phantom Lady or Kismet: A photoromance by Pushpamala N.*, 1996-98.

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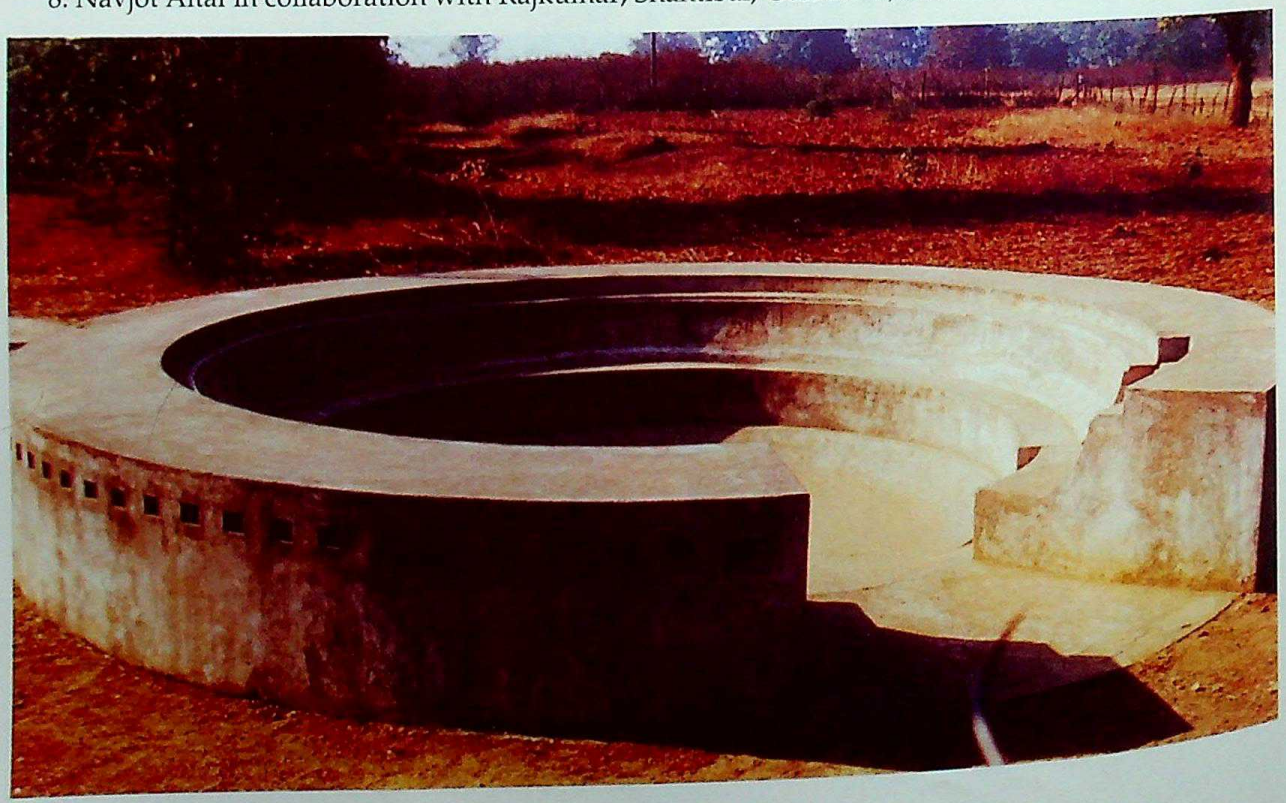
7. Sudarshan Shetty, *Home*, 1998. Paint on fibreglass and wood, stainless steel.

8. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with Rajkumar, Shantibai, Gessuram, and Kabiram, *Pilla Gudi*, 2000.



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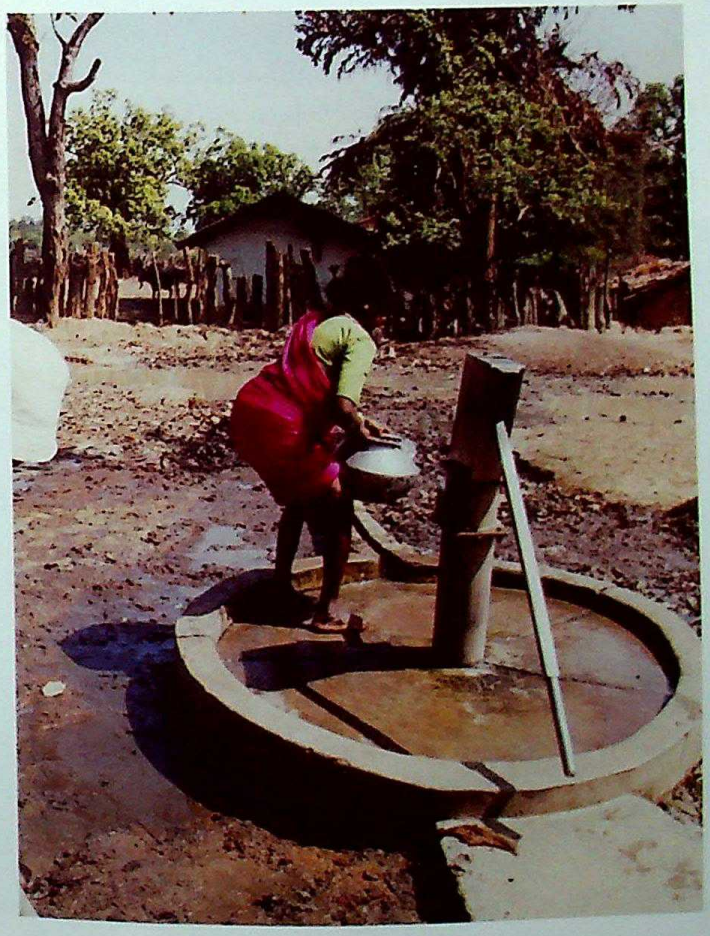
9.Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2001, Sambalpur, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft x 15ft x 70ft.

10. *The site, before the Naplar Project began*, Bandhapara, Kondagaon, Bastar.



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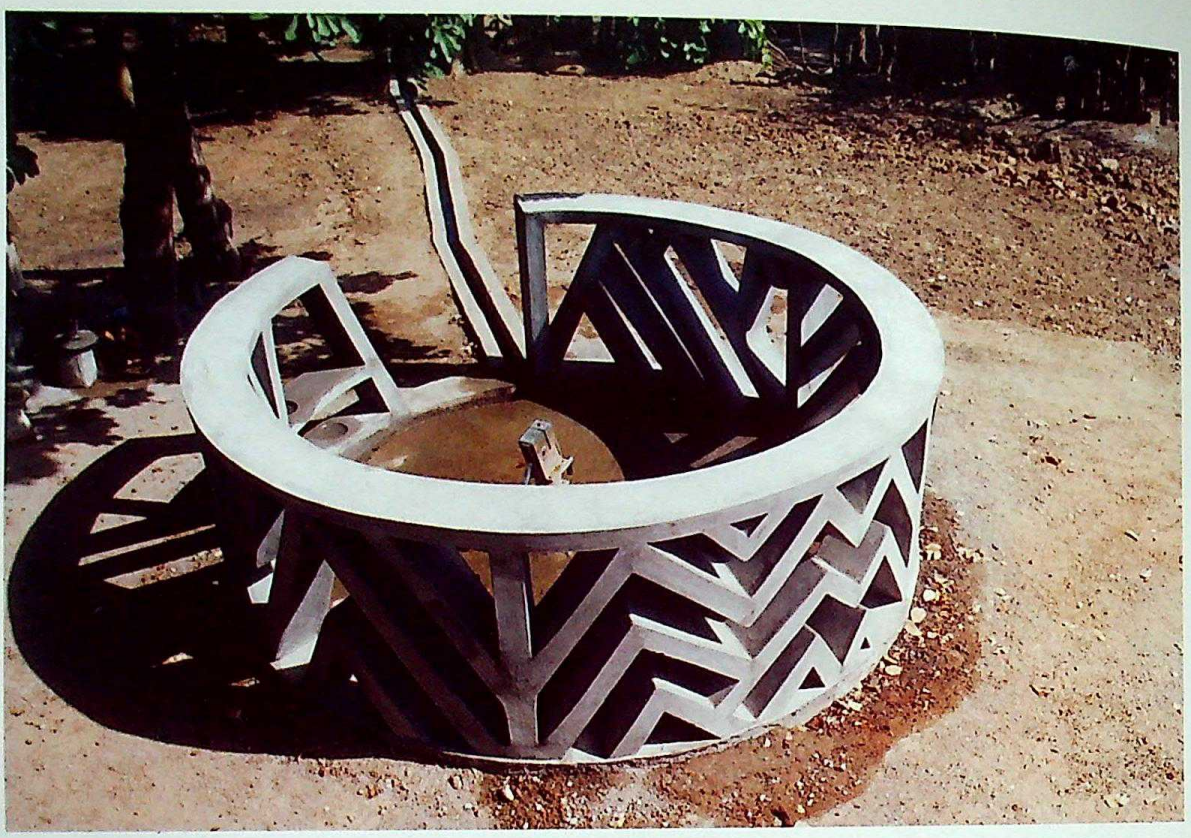

11. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2002, Bandhapara, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft (height) x 13ft (diagonally) x 70ft (drainage).

12. Navjot Altaf in collaboration with seven Adivasi women artists, *Naplar Project*, 2002, Kondagaon, Bastar, cement and iron, 6ft (height) x 15ft (diagonally) x 30ft (drainage).

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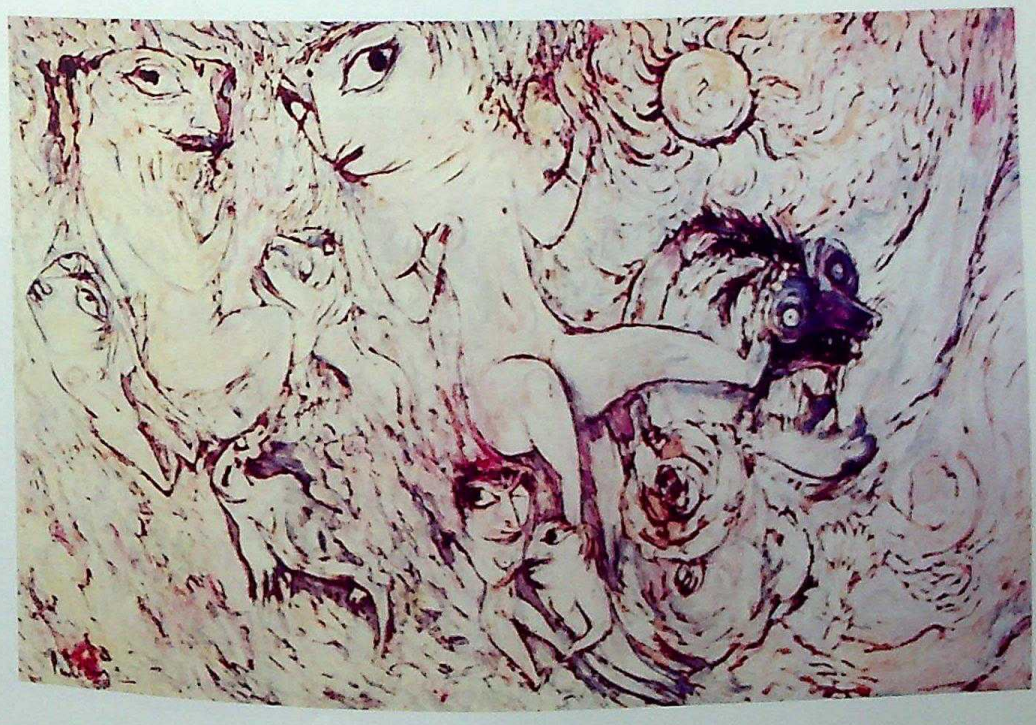
13. S. Dhanapal, *Mother and Child*, 1957.

14. K.C.S. Paniker, *The Garden*.



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15. K.C.S. Paniker (on the extreme right) showing the batik textiles to the visitors at the batik exhibition, 1963.

16. K. Ramanujam, *Untitled*, drawing, *ca.* 1968.

17. V. Arnawaz, *Drawing*, 1968.

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18 *'Ageless' Type of Terracotta Figure,*
Mathurā region, Mauryan, *ca.* 320-200 BC

19. *'Ageless' Type of Terracotta Figure,*
Śuṅga, *ca.* first century BC.

20. *'Timed' Type of Molded Terracotta Figure,*
Bihar, Mauryan, *ca.* 250 BC.

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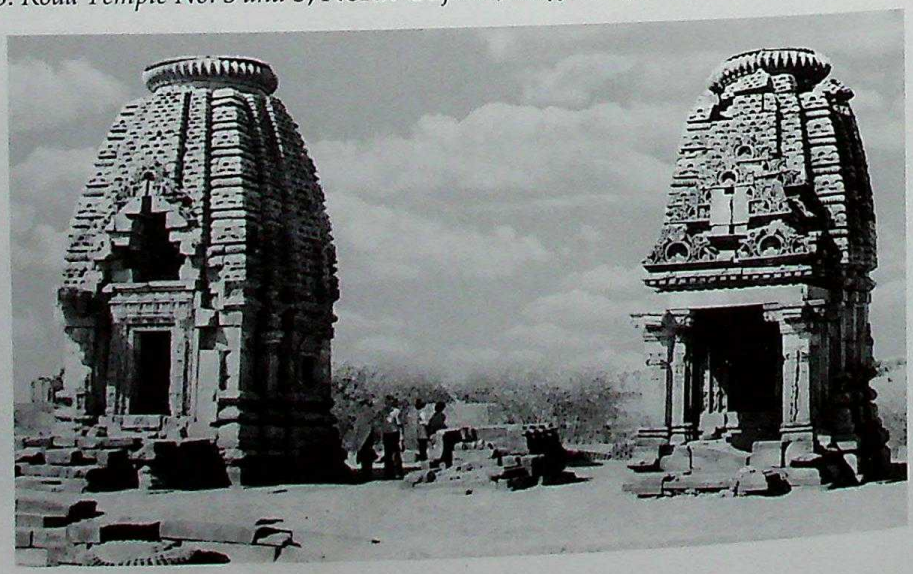
21. *'Timed' Type of Terracotta Plaque,*
Uttar Pradesh, Gupta, fifth century AD.

22. *Roda Temple No. 1*, North Gujarat,
Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.

23. *Roda Temple No. 3 and 5*, North Gujarat, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.



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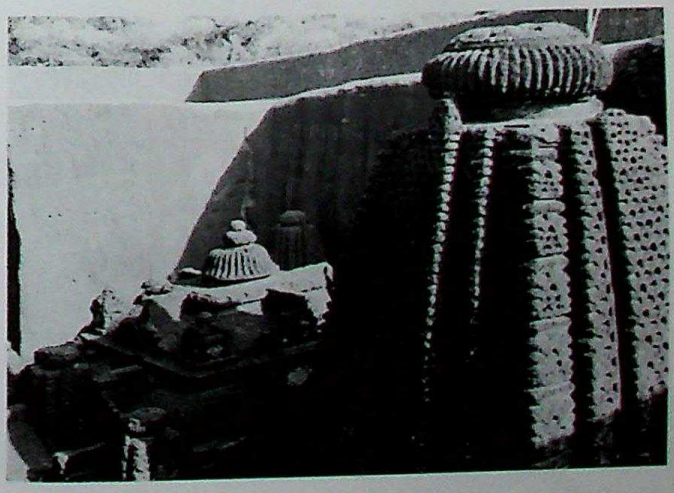
24. *Roda Temple No. 5*, North Gujarat, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, *ca.* mid-eighth century.

25. *Kāśī Viśveśvara Temple*, Pattadakkal, Karnataka, Rāṣṭrakūṭa late seventh to early ninth century.

26. *Śikhara*, Rock-cut Temple, Dhamnar, Madhya Pradesh, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, late seventh to early ninth century.



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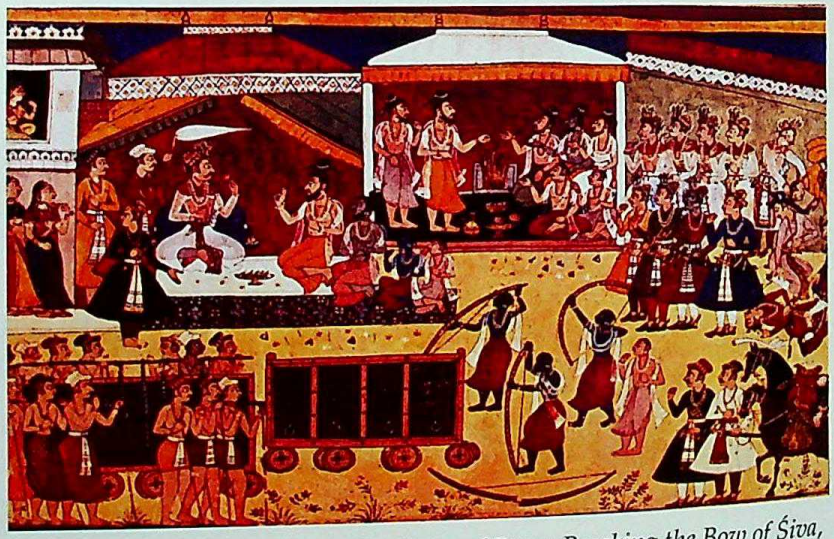
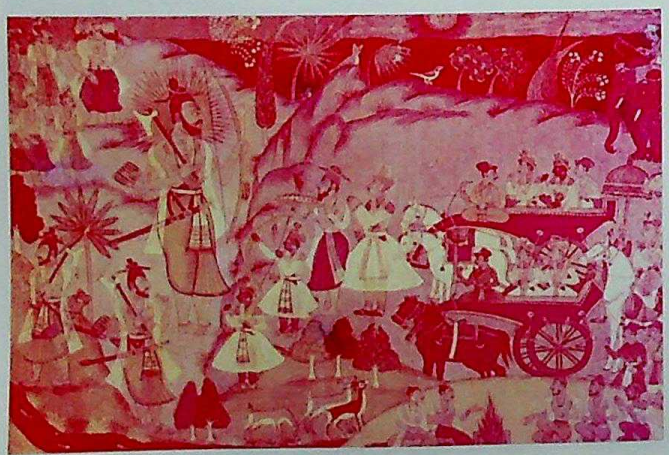
27. Nisarudin, *Māru Rāginī*, Mewar School, AD 1605.



28.Manohar, *Rāmāyaṇa — The Scene of Rama Breaking the Bow of Śiva*, Mewar School, AD 1648.



29. Manohar, *Rāmāyaṇa — The Scene of Paraśurāma's Anger*, Mewar School, AD 1648.

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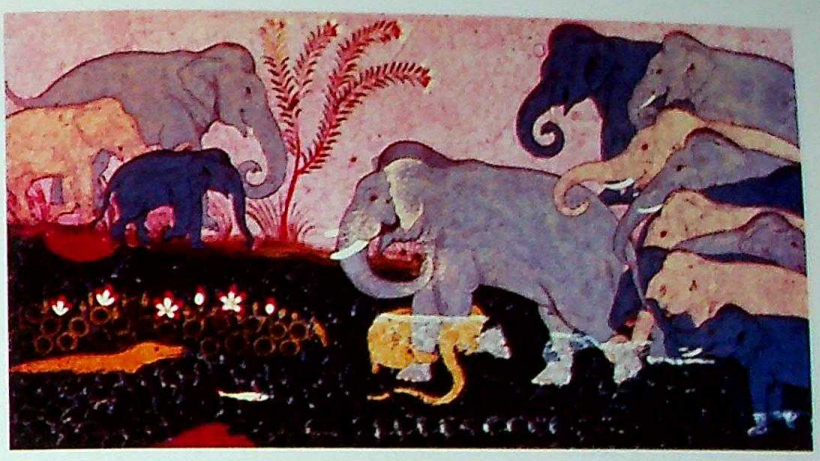
30. Sahibdin, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa — The Scene of Gajendra at the Pool*, Mewar School, AD 1648.



31.Sahibdin, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa — The Scene of Gajendramokṣam — Viṣṇu Kills the Crocodile*, Mewar School, AD 1648.

32. Amardas Bhatti, folio 17, *Suraj Prakash*, Jodhpur, 1830.

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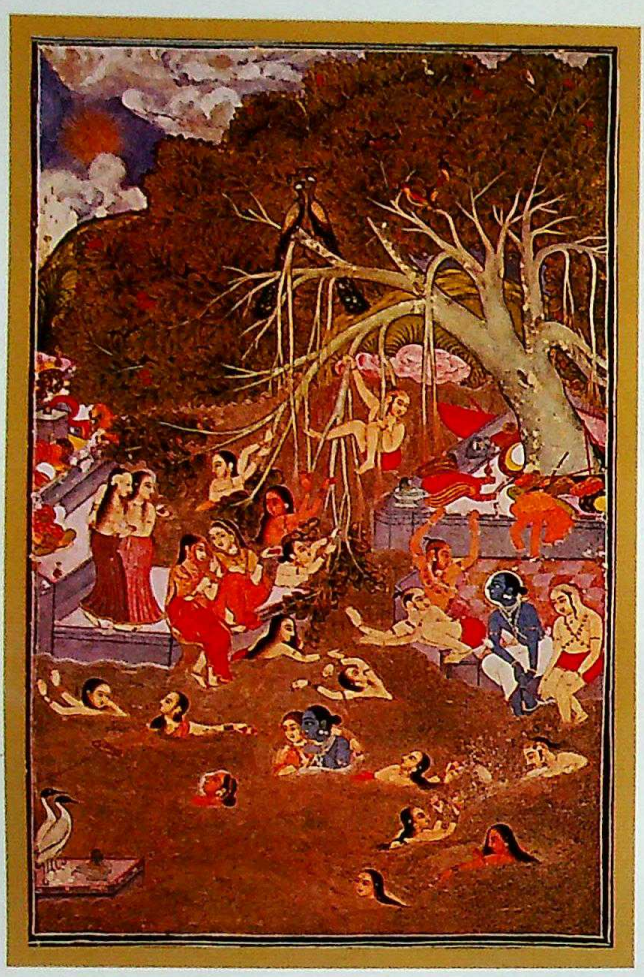
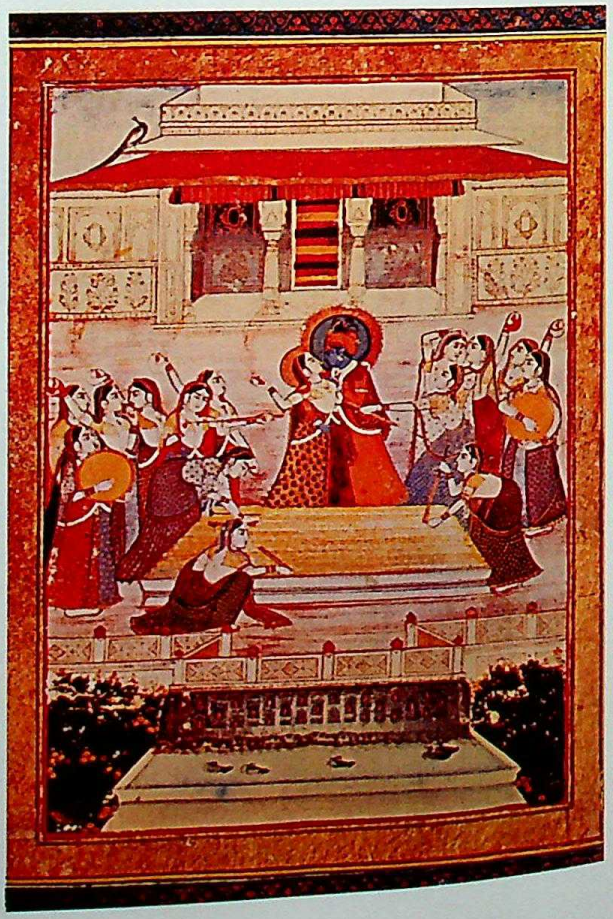


33. *Kṛṣṇa Sporting in the Yamunā*, Būṇḍī, late eighteenth century.

34. *Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Gopīs*, Jodhpur, *ca.* 1830.



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35. *Interior of the Miracle Park of St. Anthony*,Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001.

36. *Monolith of St. Anthony*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001

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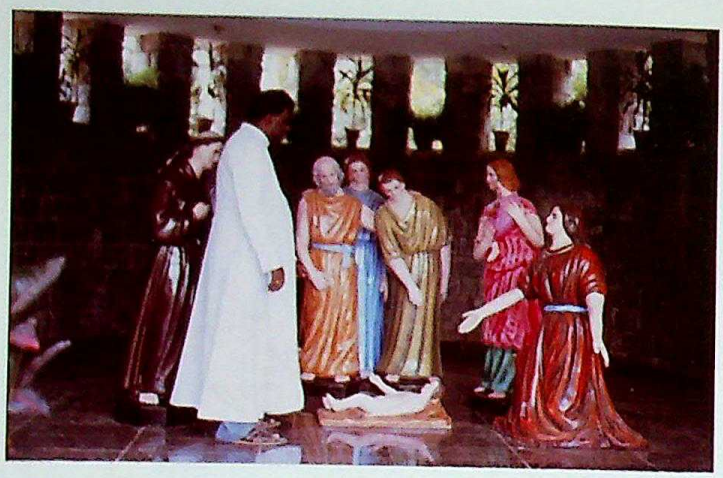

37. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Standing in the Adultery Miracle Scene*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore, inaugurated 2001.

38. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Blessing Dalit Woman in the Park in September 2001*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore.

39. *Fr. Anthony Swamy Blessing Genuflecting Dalit Woman in the Park in September 2001*, Miracle Park of St. Anthony, Tambushettypalaya, Bangalore.

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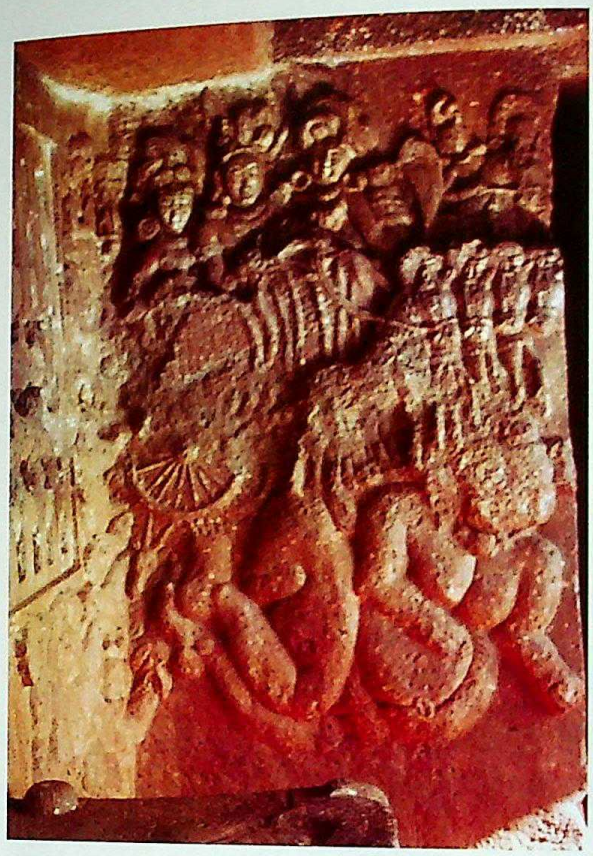

40. *Sri Satakarni's Conquest Over Kharavela*, Vihāra no. 19, Bhaja rock cut cave, Maharashtra, right wall of the porch, Sātavāhana, first quarter of second century BC.

41. *Sri Satakarni Identified Allegorically as the Buddhist Hero Mandhata*, Vihāra no. 19, Bhaja rock cut cave, Maharashtra, right wall of the Porch first quarter of second century BC.

42. *Kalleśvara Temple*, west, Kukkanur, northern Karnataka, *ca.* AD 1025.

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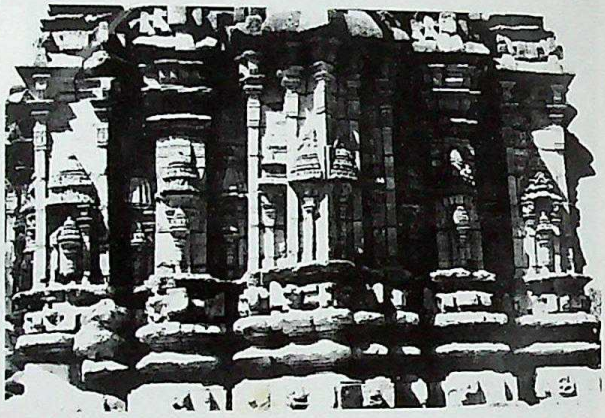
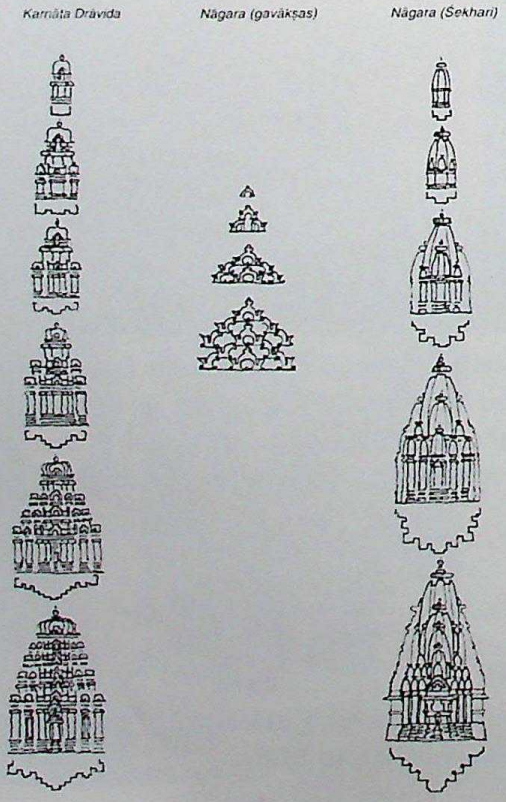
43. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, view from south-east, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.

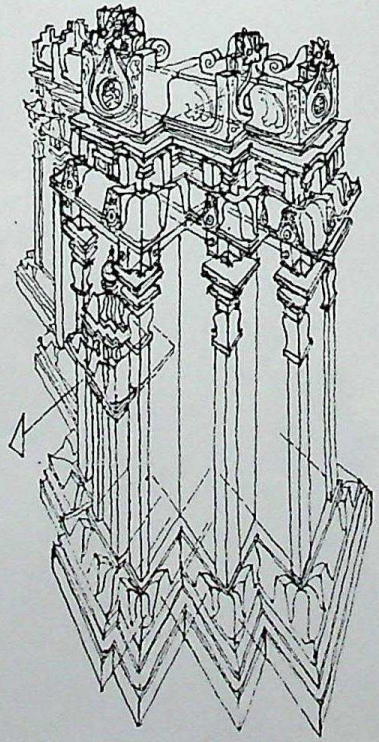
44. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, east wall detail, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.



45. *Adam Hardy's Figure 8 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).




46 .*Adam Hardy's Figure 6 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).



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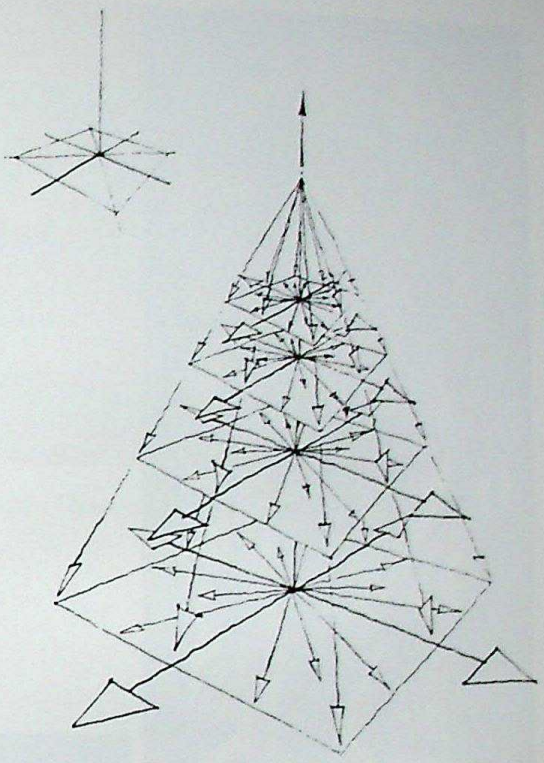
47. *Adam Hardy's Figure 1 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).



48. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.

49. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.

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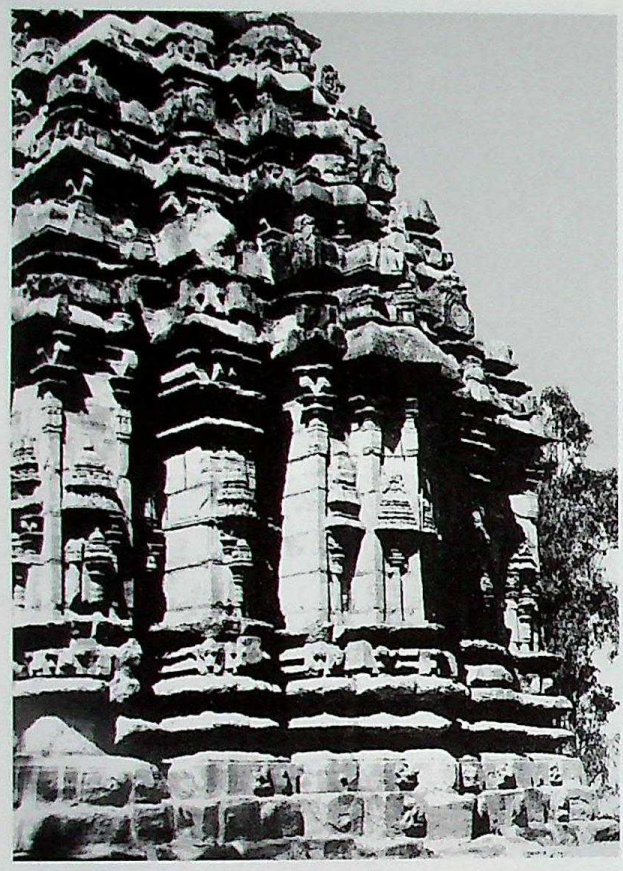
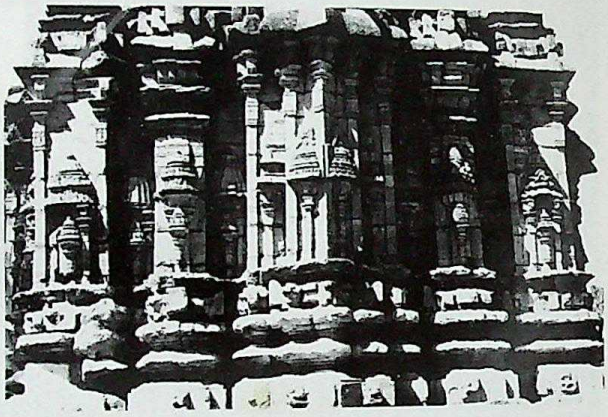
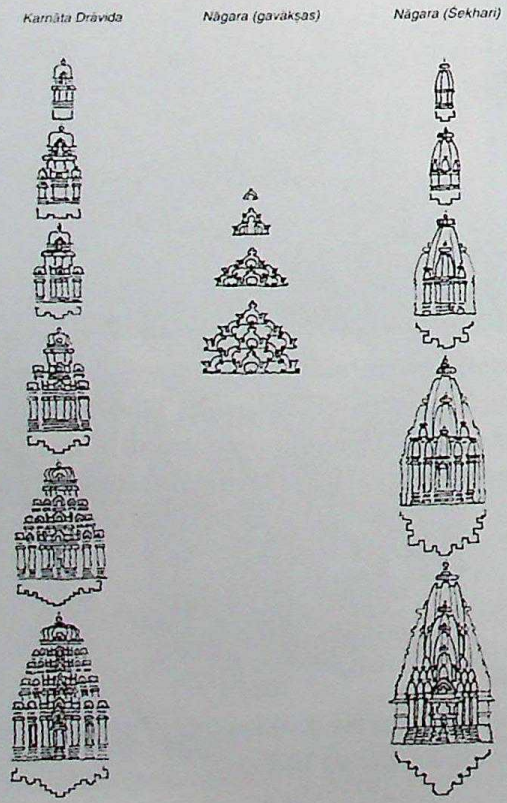


43. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, view from south-east, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.

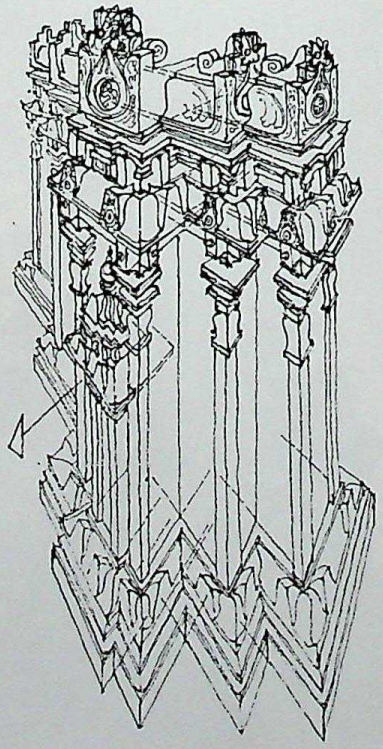
44. *Joḍa Kalaśa*, Eastern shrine, east wall detail, Sudi, northern Karnataka, mid-eleventh century.



45. *Adam Hardy's Figure 8 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).




46 .*Adam Hardy's Figure 6 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).



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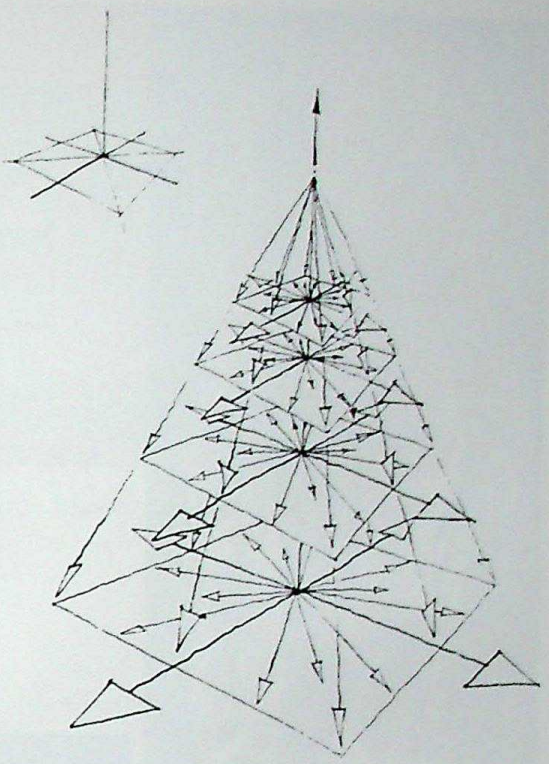
47. *Adam Hardy's Figure 1 in Indian Temple Architecture* (1995).



48. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.

49. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.

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50. *Cāmuṇḍā*, Thanesara, Udaipur, Rajasthan, sixth century AD.

51. *Mātṛkā*, Thanesara, Udaipur, Rajasthan, sixth century AD.

52. *Skanda-Kārttikeya*, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.

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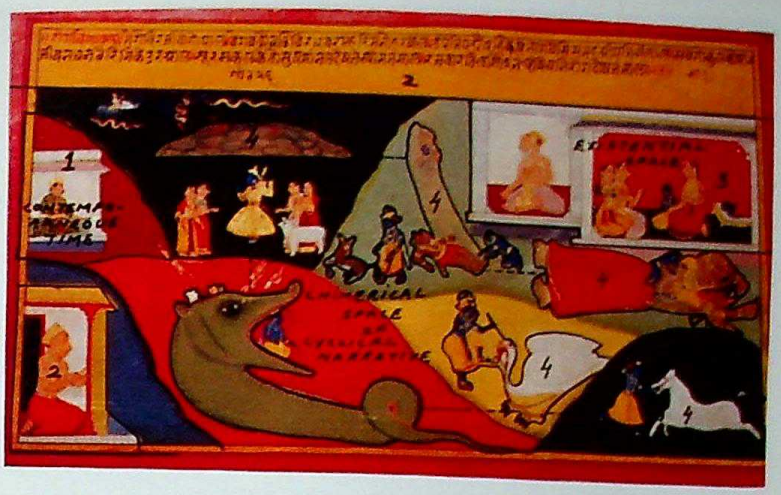
53. *Mātṛkā* with child, Shamalaji, Sabarkantha, Gujarat, sixth century AD.



54. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.

55. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.

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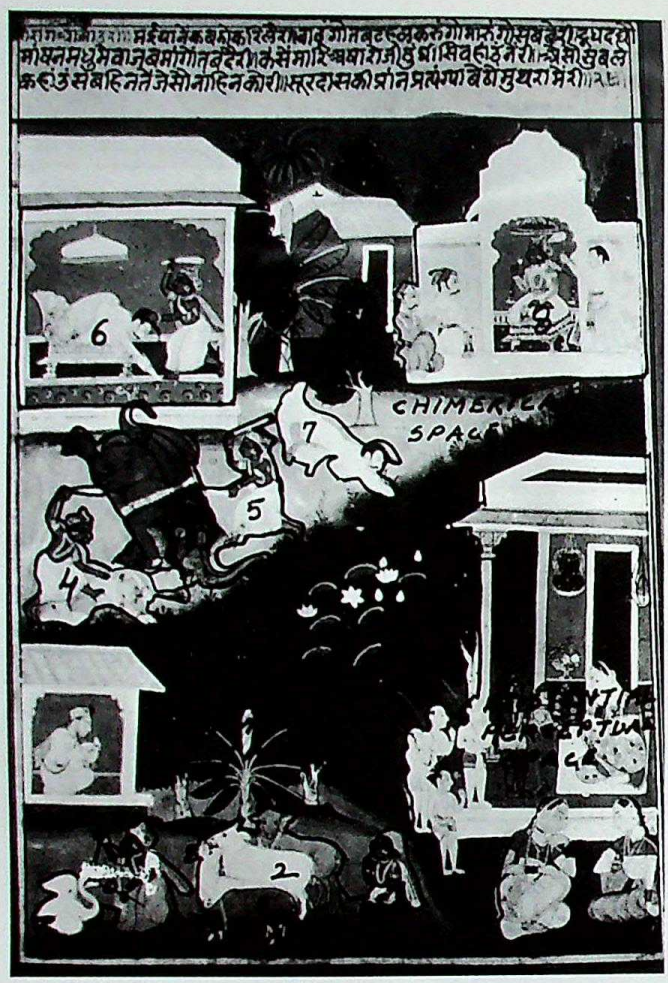
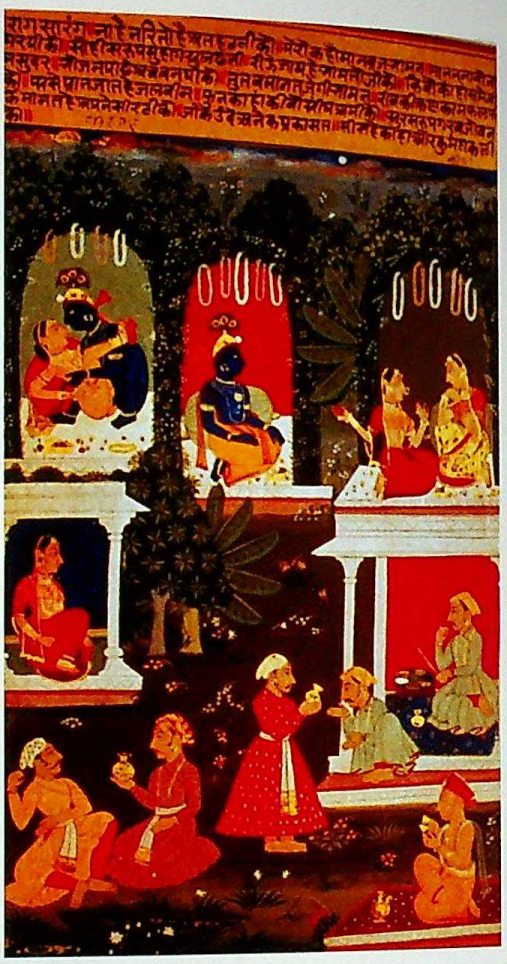



56. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1710.



57. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1710.

58. *Sūrsāgar*, Mewar School, *ca.* AD. 1690-1700.

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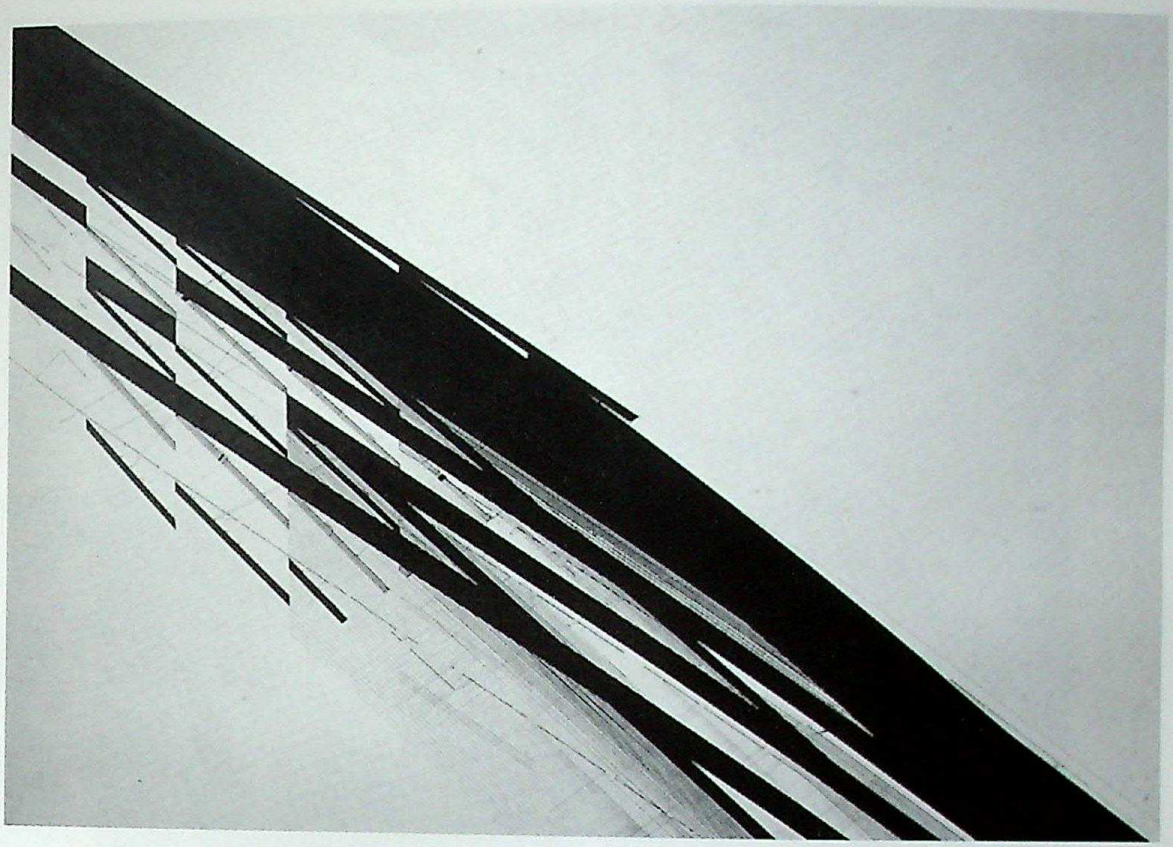
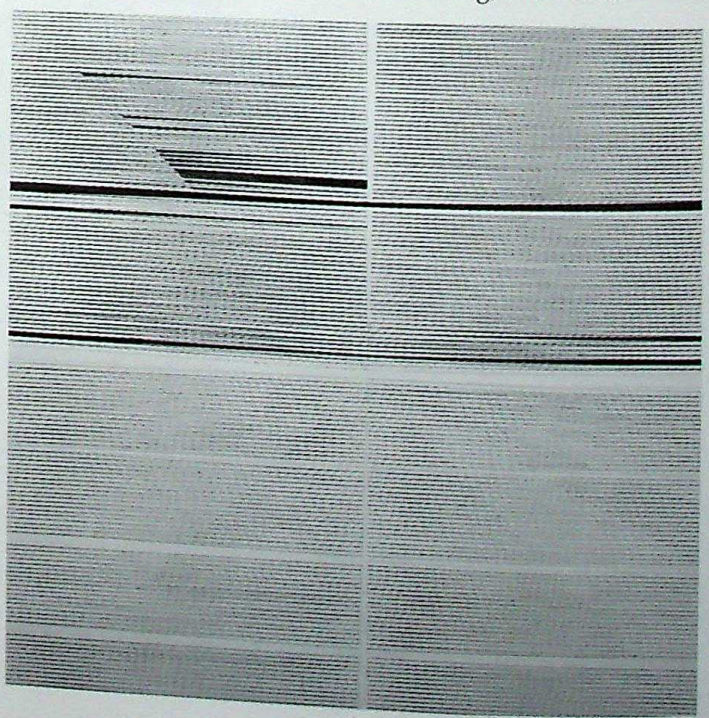


59. Nasreen Mohamadi, *Drawing,* late 1970s.

60. Nasreen Mohamadi, *Drawing,* late 1980s.



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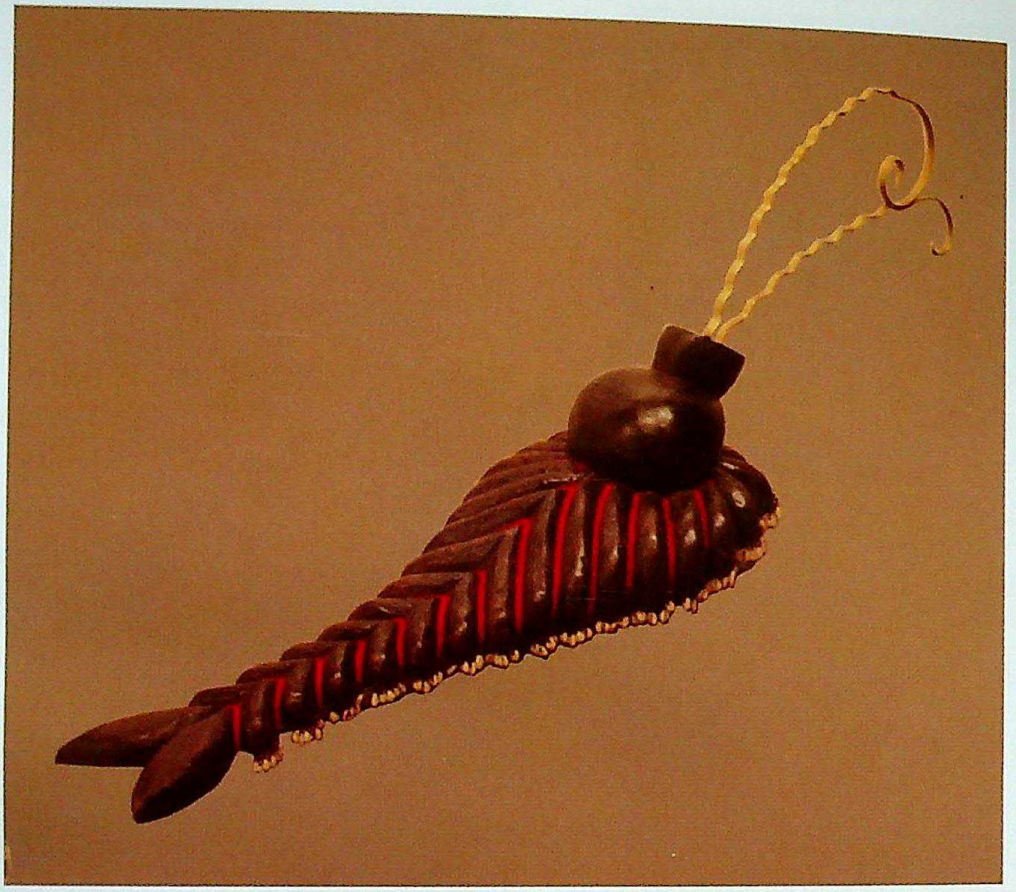
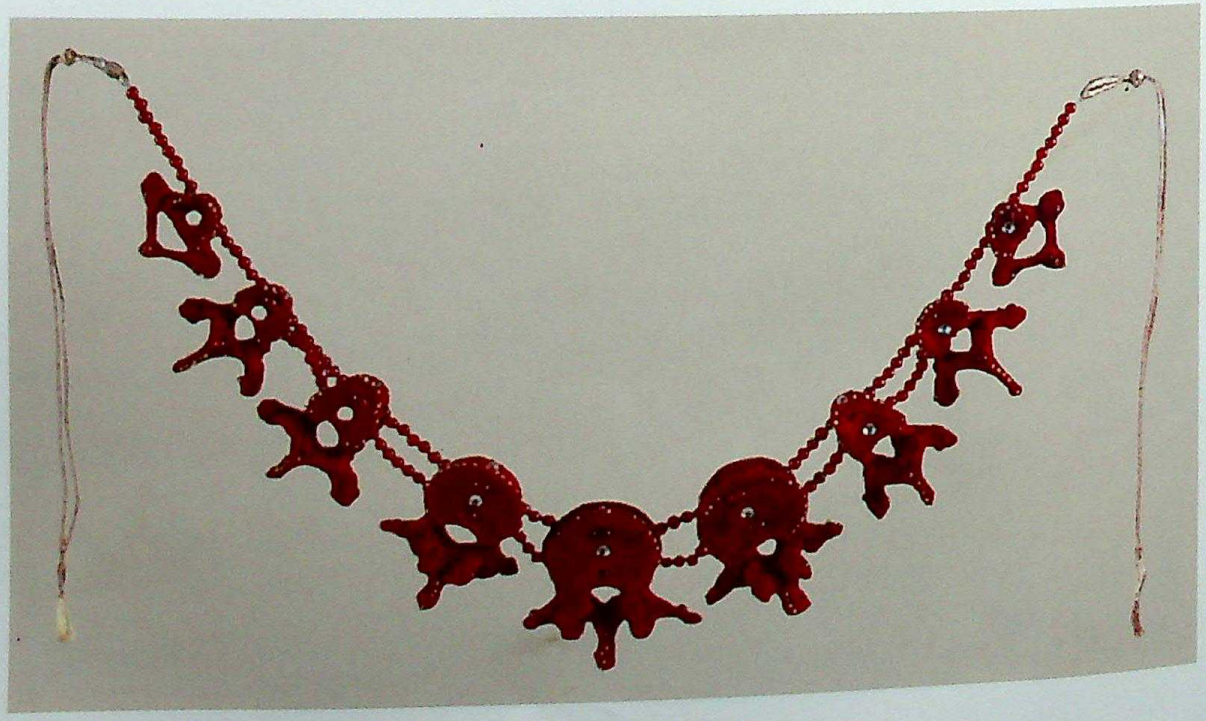


61. Anita Dube, *Trajectory of Piss*, 1995.

62. Anita Dube, *Garlend — part of Silence* (*Blood Wedding*) — a 13 piece Installation, 1997.



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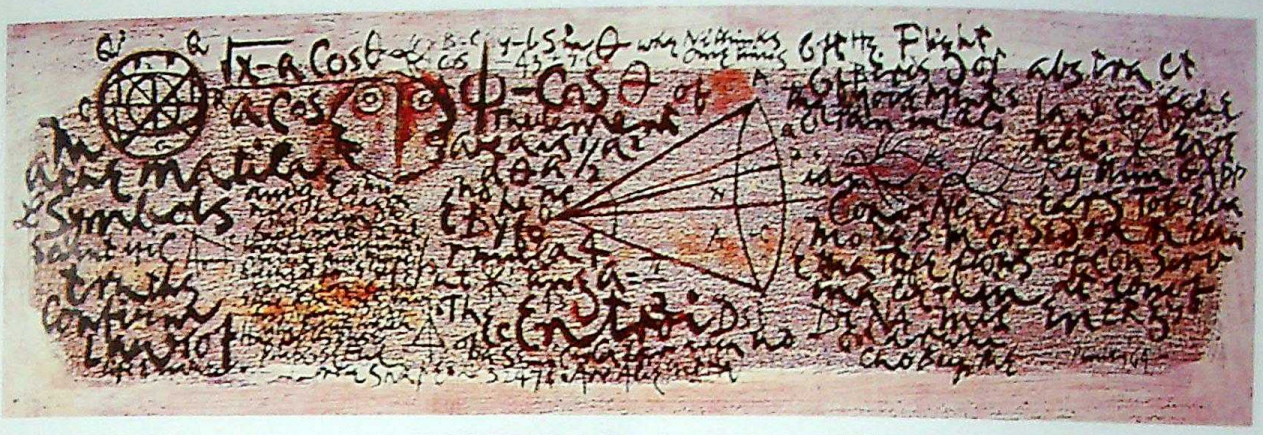

63. K.C.S. Paniker, *Words and Symbols*, 1965.

64. L. Munuswamy, *Untitled*, *ca.* 1980s.

65. K.M. Adimoolam, *The Land I Chose*, *ca.* 1980s.

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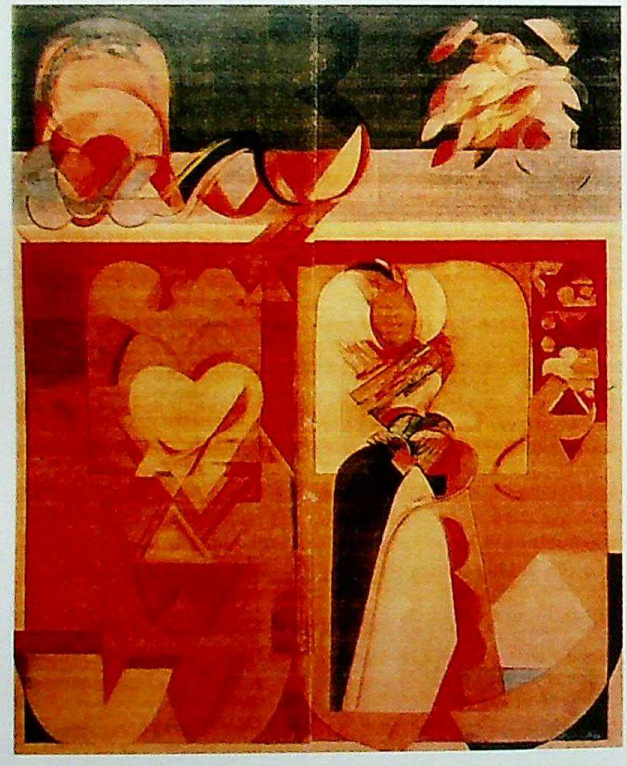
66. V. Viswanathan, *Untitled*, *ca*. 1972.



67. P. Gopinath, *Biomorphic Form*, *ca*. 1982.

68. Achutan Kudallur, *Untitled*, 2000.

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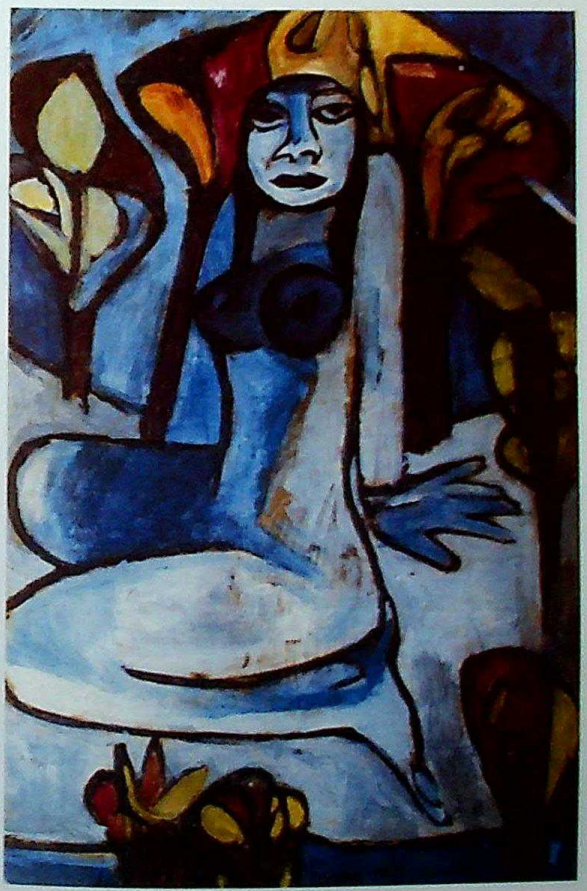
69. T.K. Padmini, *Woman, ca.* 1963.

70. T.K. Padmini, *The Body*, 1965.



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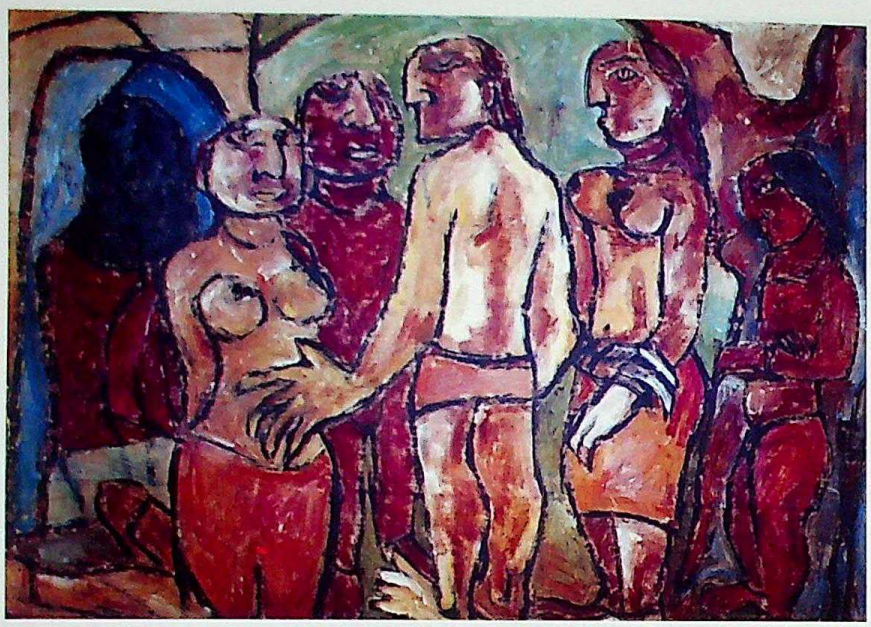

71. T.K. Padmini, *Woman Listening*, *ca*. 1963.

72. T.K. Padmini, *Woman and Child*, *ca*. 1964.

73. T.K. Padmini, *The Body*, *ca*. 1965.

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74. *Kubera Yakṣa*, Bharhut pillar, Śuṅga, *ca*. early first century BC.

75. *Candra Yakṣī*, Bharhut pillar, Śuṅga, *ca*. early first century BC.

76. *Bodhisattva*, Sarnath, Kuṣāṇa, inscribed third year of Kaniṣka's reign, AD 81.

77. *Standing Buddha*, Sarnath, Gupta, (dated AD 474).

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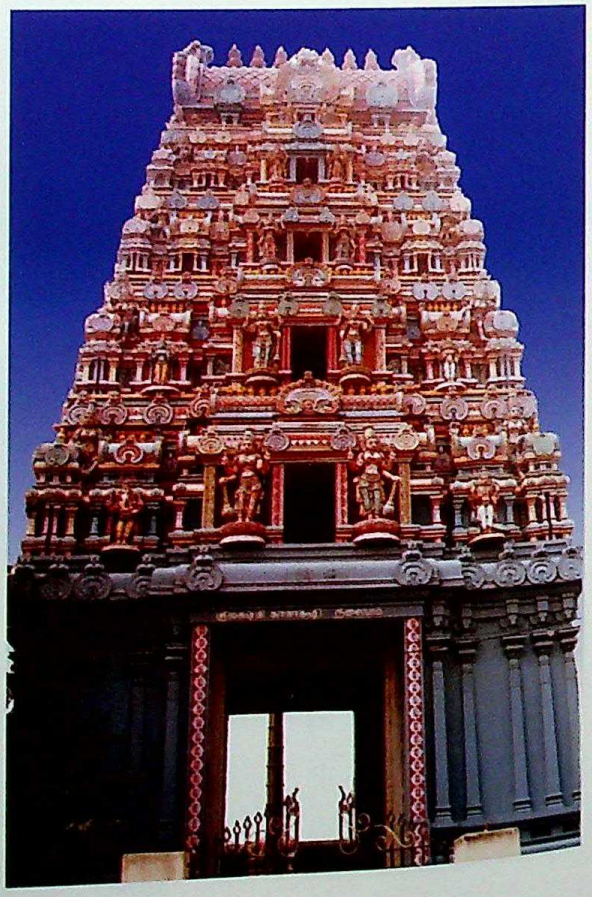
78. *Standing Buddha*, Mathura, Gupta, *ca*. last quarter of fifth century AD.

79. *Gopuram*, Gandhi Maṇḍapam, Chennai, 1953.



80. Muthaiya Stapati, *Gopuram of Kāmākṣī Amman Temple*, Chennai 1980s.

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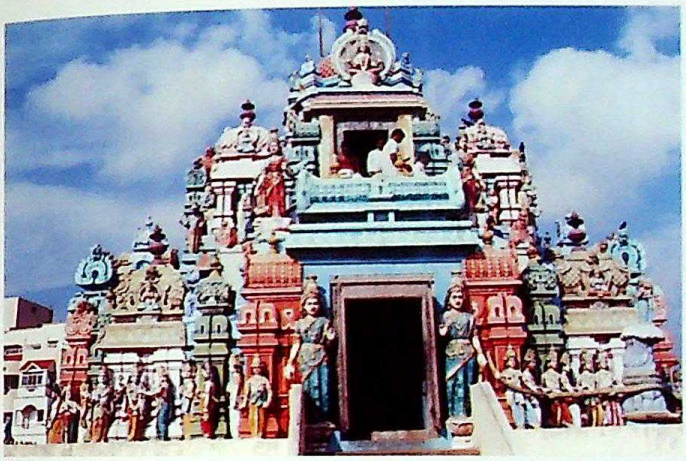
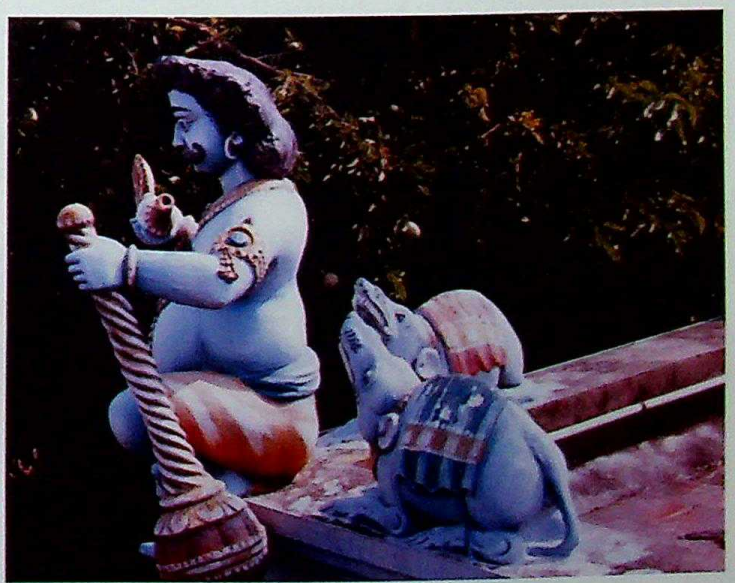


81. Muthaiyah Sthapati, *Vimāna of Aṣṭalakṣmī Temple*, Chennai, 1978.

82. P. Sambhandham, *Gopuram of the Ellai Amman Temple*, Besant Nagar Chennai, 1990.

83. *Gaṇa Figure*, Shri Devi Ellaiamman temple, Chennai, 2000.

84. Vishwanathan Sthapati, *Gaṇa Figure*, Varasiddhi Vinayakar temple, Chennai, 1979.



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85. *Kṛṣṇa Teasing Gopī*, Madhubani, Brahmin and Kayastha Style, 1999.

86. *Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa*, Madhubani, Brahmin and Kayastha Style, 1999.

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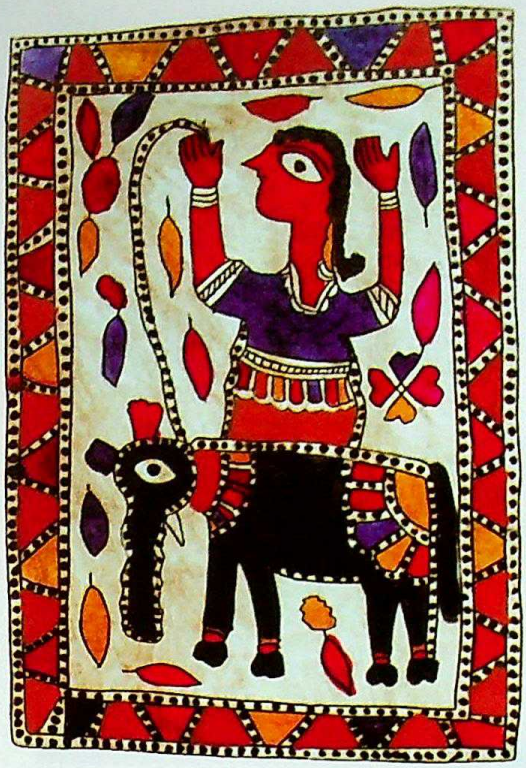
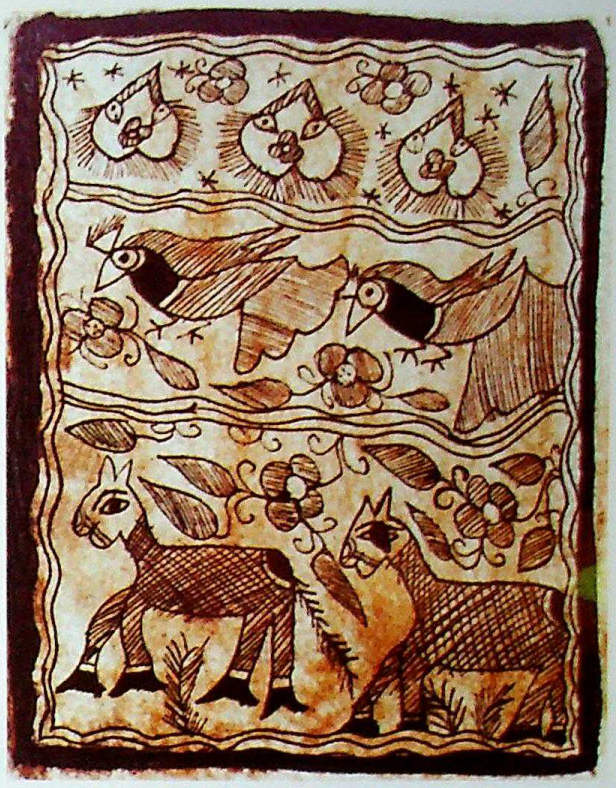


87. *The Mythical Hero Rājā Salheśa,* Dusadh Madhubani Style, 1999.



88. *Godanā,* Dusadh Madhubani Style, 1999.

89. *Birds and Dancers,* Dusadh Madhubani Style, 1999.

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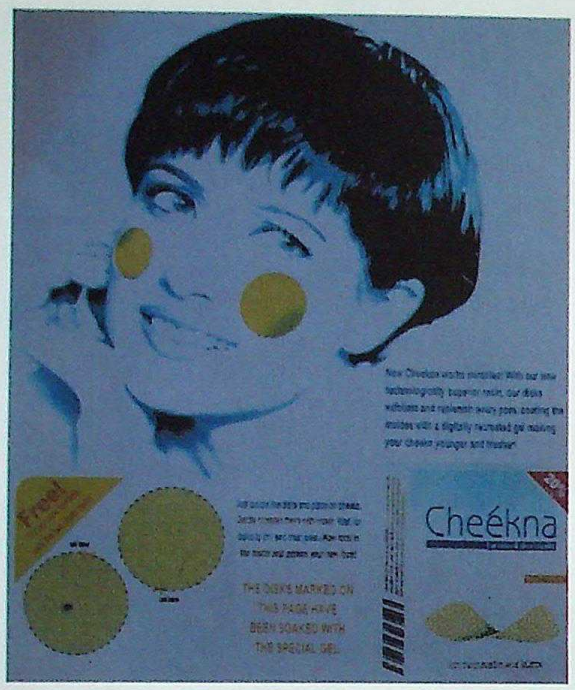
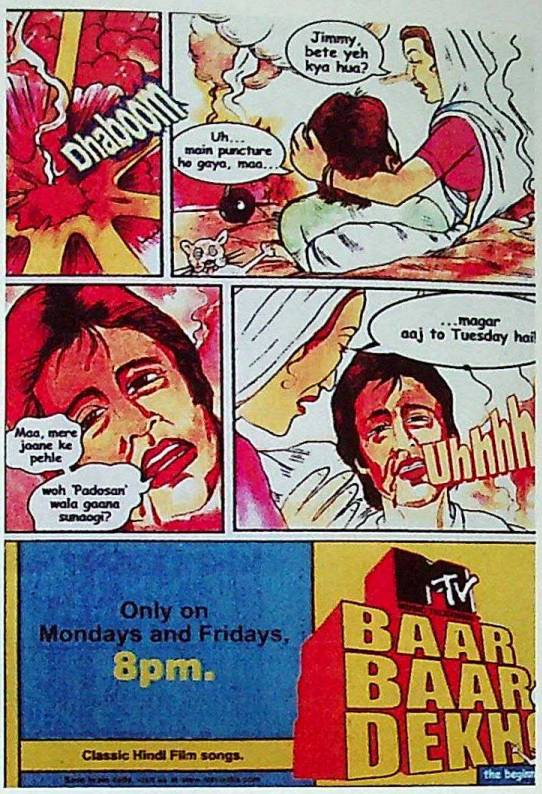



90. An MTV image, '*The representation of the relative freedom of women in terms of absence of conflict as in commercial advertisement. . .*'




91. An MTV image, '*. . . bilingual idiosyncrasies and intertextuality is parodied to advertise for their program on classical hits songs called Bar Bar Dekho. . .*'

92. An MTV image, '*Indi pop stars are celebrated and masqueraded in garbs of famous Indian politicians. . .*'

93. An MTV image, '*Indi pop stars are celebrated and masqueraded in garbs of famous Indian politicians. . .*'

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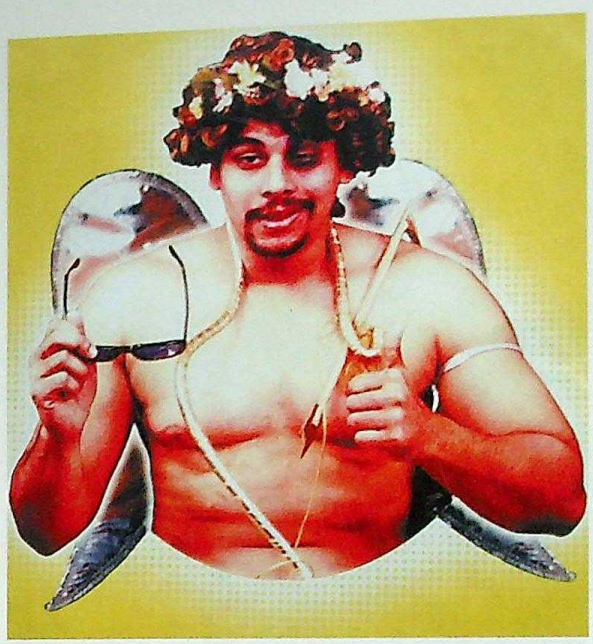

94. An MTV image, *Cyrus Broacha-personifying MTV in India.*

95. *Saffron Flags in the Visarjan Procession — Gaṇeśa-caturthī Festival*, Pune, 2001.

96. *Lathi Fighting as part of the Visarjan Procession — Gaṇeśa-caturthī Festival*, Pune, 2001.

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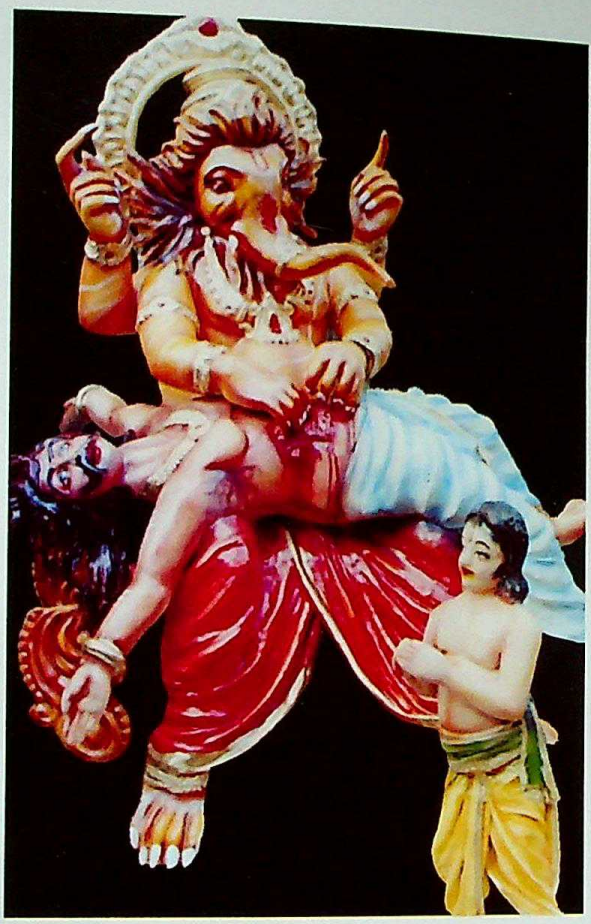
97. *Gaṇapati Image on a Dish Antenna,* Baroda, 2001



98. *Gaṇapati as Narasiṁha,* Pune, 2001.

99. *Enactment of a Scene from the Film Gadar Before the Gaṇapati Image,* Baroda, 2001.

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100. *Windowed Interface, Fragmented, Multi-sequential. Home Page*, contemporary, Art Portal, www.saffronart.com

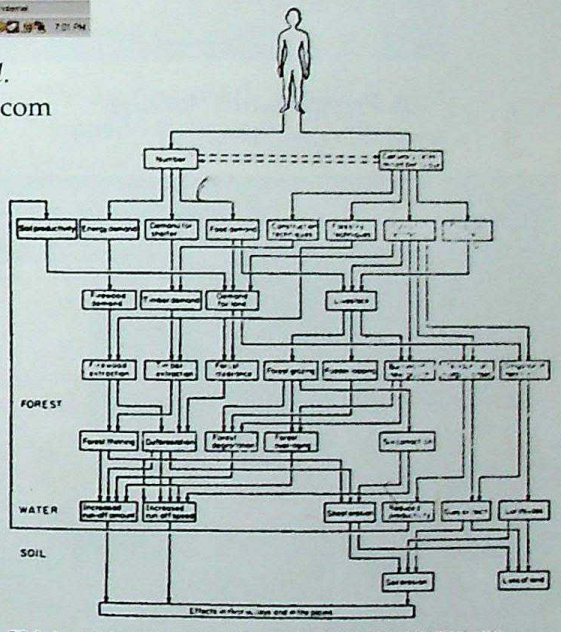


FIG. 7.1. Diagram of the causal chains and the damages resulting from forest destruction and the increase in erosion. (*After* Kollmorgen, F. Erosion—eine globale Gefahr, *Mitteilungen Forum* 79: 187-243, 1971).

101. *Web of relationships, Diagram of Causal Chains and Damages Resulting from Forest Destruction and Increase in Erosion.*

102. *Cosmic Pārśvanātha*, Rajasthan, Jodhpur eighteenth century.

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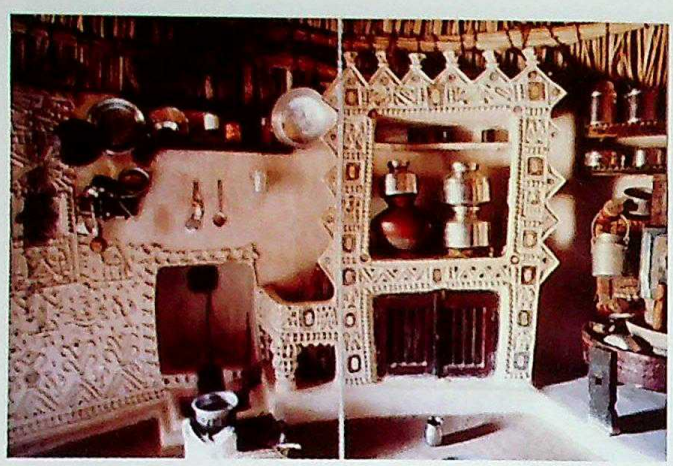
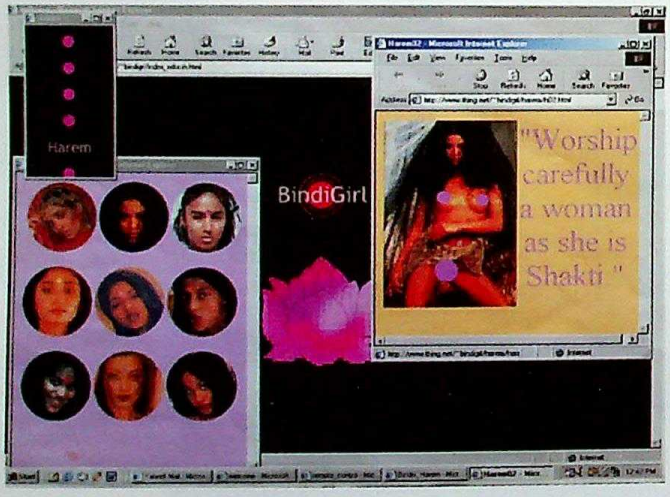


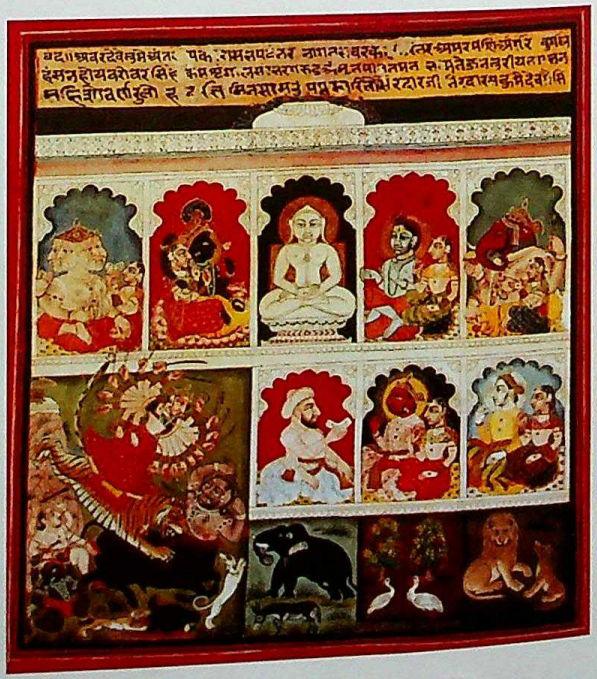
103. *Kitchen Corner in a Traditional Rabari Hut,* Rann of Kucch, contemporary.

104. *Śaṅkhāvali Pati*, a conceptual map of memories a pilgrim's souvenir, depicting Jagannātha temple and other sacred sites in Purī. Orisa, Purī district, early twentieth century.

105. Prema Murthy, Bindigirl, www.thing.net/bindigirl/, 1999.




106. *A Jina, Hindu Deities and Animals,* Rajasthan, Mewar, *c.* 1650-75.



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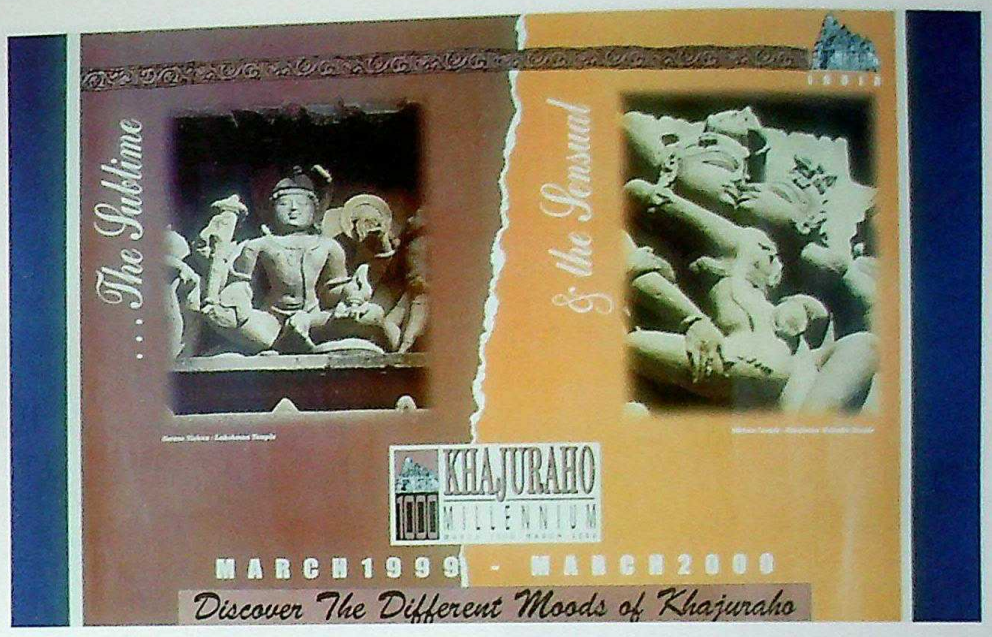
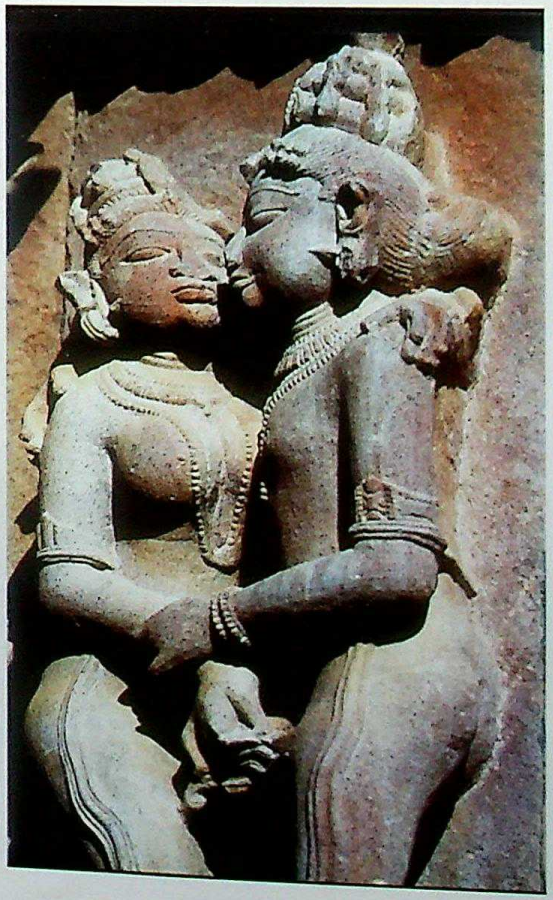



107. *Example of a tourist poster invoking 'The Sublime and the Sexual', brought out by Madhya Pradesh Tourism on the occasion of the 'Khajuraho Millennium'.*

108. *Example of a typical photographically amplified image of the erotic sculpture on the walls of the Khajuraho temples.*



109. M.F. Husain, *Sarasvati*, *c.* 1970s
(reproduced from a newspaper illustration of 1996.)

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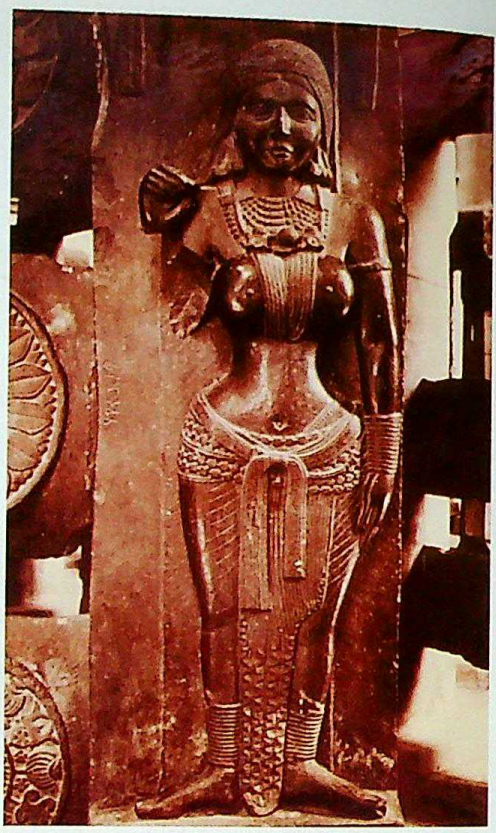
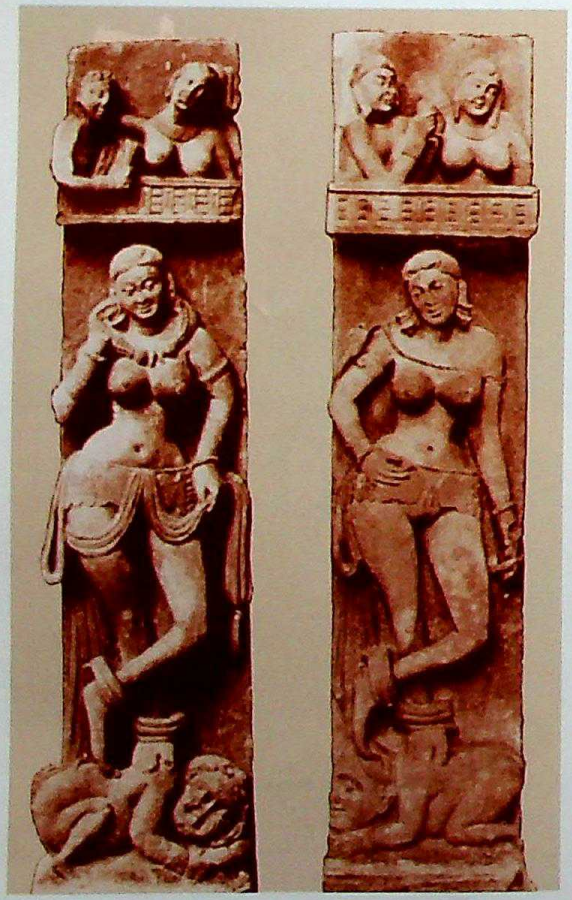
110. Still of Madhuri Dixit from M.F. Husain's film, *Gaja-Gamini.*



111. *Yakṣī,* Bharhut railing pillar, Śuṅga, *c.* second century BC.



112. *The 'Bhūteśvara Yakṣīs' of Mathura,* Kuṣāṇa, c. second century BC.

113. *Example of sensually posed 'Surāsundarīs' on the walls of the Khajuraho temples.*

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114. *A view of the Chettiar house interior with pillars and doorway to contextualise the theme of 'Home to Temple'*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

115. *A view of the divine vāhana, yali and mayūra in the town section of the 'Home to Temple' theme*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

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116. *A view of the 'Medieval India' gallery with the central axis passing through the sandstone gateway of late seventeenth century from Vraja area*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

117. *A view of the 'Medieval India' gallery showing the display of Rājpūt and Mogul textiles and decorative objects*, South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

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118. *A view of the Religion section showing a spout, lion, Bāhubali and Buddha images,* South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

119. *A view of the Buddhist architecture display with Sāñcī stūpa rendered in the background for contextuality,* South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

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120. *A view of the maṇḍovara display showing a medieval nāgara temple wall with sculptures of Yoginī, Cāmuṇḍā, Apsaras and Dancing Gaṇeśa from Madhya Pradesh,*
South Asia Gallery, Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore.

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# Index

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# Index

*abhaya*, 260
*abhidhā*, 34, 191
*abhihitānvayavāda*, 34
Abhinavagupta, 324
*Abhinaya Darpaṇa*, 20
Abstract Expressionism, 234, 238
abstraction, 59, 117, 230-31, 233-35, 237-41, 405
*ācārya*, 144, 146, 420
Achuthan, 240
Adajania, Nancy, 321
*adhiṣṭhāna*, 417, 421
Adigalar, Bangaru, 271
Adimoolam, 115, 230, 234, 236-37, 239
Adimoolam, K.M., 117
Advaita Vedāntins, 319
aesthetic, 53, 54, 75, 77, 80, 106, 115, 165-66, 171, 198, 240, 245, 253, 295, 303, 312-13, 316, 323, 340, 349, 351, 358, 363, 367-68, 372, 377, 386, 394, 395
aesthetics, 60, 103, 231, 239, 241, 324, 360, 371, 397, 419
Aga Khan, Sadruddin, 160
Āgamas, 270
Agarwals, Meenal, 84
ageless, 57, 133-35
*aghora mūrtis*, 20
Agrawal, V.S., 190, 397, 369
Ahicchatra, 259
*Ahirbudhnya-Saṁhitā*, 21
Ahmed, Aijaz, 127
Ahsonutti, 255
Aiyenar, 421
Ajanta, 4, 95, 110, 126, 155, 321-23, 350
*ākaṅkṣā*, 34, 60, 319
Akbar Padamsee, 161, 282
Akbarī, 350
*Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, 160
*Ākhyāyikas*, 58
Akota, 156
Akṣobhya, 420
*Alaṅkāra*, 413
*alaṅkārika*, 34-35
*alasa-kanyās*, 373
*āliṅgana mūrti*, 35
Allchin, Bridget, 135
allegory, 58, 76, 113, 192
Almond, 135
Alpers, Svatlana, 37
Alphonso, A., 113, 118
Altaf, Navjot, 83, 56
Amar, Rana Singh, 161
Amaravati, 20, 191, 137, 344
Amardās Bhaṭṭi, 165, 167, 170
Ambadas, K., 113, 231
Ambal, 272
Ambedkar, B.R., 180, 391
Amberkar, V.R., 2
America, Mark, 312
Amjhara, 202
Amman, Ellai, 272
*amman* goddess, 232, 271
Amoghavarṣa, 156
Amrita Sher-Gil, 59, 223
anaesthetics, 294
Anand, Mulk Raj, 136, 373
Anandvardhana, 324
Anderson, Benedict, 401
Andhare, Shridhar, 159
*aṅgulas*, 147
*Aṅśumadbhedāgama*, 19
Antal, Frederick, 39
Anthony, Fr. Swamy, 176
anti-aesthetic, 323
antiquities, 338, 342
*anugraha mūrtis*, 20
*anuttarajñānavāpati*, 261
*anvitābhidhāna*, 32, 34
*anvitābhidhānavāda*, 32, 34, 36
*Aparājitapṛcchā*, 142, 144-46, 259
Appadurai, Arjun, 300, 306
appropriation, 165, 167,171
*aprastut-praśaṁsā*, 32
*apsarā-devāṅganās*, 114, 370, 417, 421
Ara, K.H., 76
archaeological, 340, 367-68
Report, 19
Archaeological Survey of India, 368
Archer, Mildred, 290, 349-50
Archer, W.G., 290, 349, 400, 403, 406

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*Ardhanārīśvara*, 256
Arnawaz, V., 113-15, 243
art, 50, 52-53, 58, 60, 89, 90, 95, 142, 253, 333, 336-37, 338-39, 342, 344, 349, 352, 358, 364-66, 368, 375-78, 385-87, 396-97
-Collaboration, 56
conventional History, 52
/craft, 50, 93, 114, 198, 350
Criticism, 1, 37, 41
Deco, 175
elite art, 289
historical, 367
History, 1, 41
industrial, 338, 339
local/regional histories of art, 56
Social History, 39, 41
Art History, 16, 42, 50, 61, 122, 173, 333, 345, 352, 358-59, 361, 366, 369, 371, 387
academic, 2, 36
Asian, 333
conventional, 49-51, 53-54, 56-57, 61, 122, 160, 400
Critical, 36
European, 28
nationalist, 348, 385
New Art History, 15, 36-37, 39, 41-42, 50-51, 54, 56, 61, 100, 122, 254, 398, 400-01
Traditional, 49, 265
western, 29
western feminist, 57, 122-23
*artha*, 33, 314, 316, 319
*Arthaśāstra*, 189, 192
Arul, Alphonso Doss, 234
*Āsana*, 25
*Ashta Vinayaka*, 279
Asiatic Society of Bengal, 338-39, 402
*Aṣṭalakṣmī*, 272
*aṣṭāṅga*, 146
atemporal, 321
*Atharvaveda*, 189
*atīta kathā*, 192
aura, 101
Aurangzeb, 212
Aurobindo, Sri, 50
auteur, 284
authentic, 243, 265, 267, 271-72
authenticity, 50, 83, 101, 231, 233, 244, 274, 312-13, 338, 366, 377
authorship, 49, 101, 211, 213-14
auto-criticism, 51
avant-garde, 55-57, 69, 77, 106
avant-garde photography, 84
*avatāravāda*, 21
*āyāmakāra*, 147
*āyudha*, 19, 21, 33

Baars, B.J., 315
Bachchan, Amitabh, 79-80, 298
Badami, 345
Badoh Pathari, 209
Baghel, Jaidev, 92
Bagul, Baburao, 73
Bai, Rama, 108
Baij, Ramkinkar, 407
Bal, Mieke, 309
Bāla Kṛṣṇa, 423
Balasubramaniyam, 118
Bāṇa, 27
Banarjea, J.N., 21-23, 31, 258
Bankidas, 169
Barrell, John, 37
Barthes, Roland, 34, 38, 41, 214, 321-23, 429
Barucha, Rustom, 309
Basohli, 351, 422
Bastar, 56, 88, 92-98
Battis, Walter, 403
Battista, Leon Alberti, 38
Baudrillard Jean, 41, 101
Baxandall, Michael, 37, 57
Bazaar painting, 350
Bazin, Andre, 103
Becker, Lutz, 69
Beg, Farrukh, 350
Behari, Benod Mukherji, 406
Bell, Clive, 351
Belur, 365
Bendre, N.S., 2, 231, 407
Bengal School, 404, 406
Benjamin, Walter, 71, 39
Berger, John, 51, 39
Beuys, Joseph, 224
Bhabha, Homi, 302
Bhagat, Ashrafi, 59
Bhagat, Dhanraj, 404-05
*Bhagavad Gītā*, 21
*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 211-12, 162
Bhairava, 421
Bhaja, 189, 191
*bhajans*, 179
*bhakti*, 423
Bhandarkar, R.D., 19
Bharata, 324
Bharatanāṭyam, 423
Bharhut, 123-24, 338, 343-44, 369-71
Bhartṛhari, 33-34, 60, 316, 320
Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa* theory, 318
Bhaskaran, R.B., 113, 117, 234
Bhatt, Markand, 2
Bhattacharya, Binoytosh, 26
Bhattacharya, Dipak, 27
Bhattacharya, Rahul, 61
Bhaṭṭāraka, 201
*bhāva*, 372, 396
Bhavan, Bharat, 89
Bhavana, 423
Bhikku Bāla Bodhisattva, 259

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Bhinmal, 202
Bhoja, 35
*Bhṛgu-Saṁhitā*, 144
Bhṛtyas, 146
*bhūmisparśa*, 260
Bhuvandevācārya, 142
Bhuvaneswar, 365, 367
Bihārī, 35
  *Satsai*, 4
Biomorphic, 239
Birdwood, George, 340, 342
*bodhi*, 191, 259
*bodhisattavas*, 26, 258, 261
Bollenson, 18
Bolter, Jay, 314-15
Bombay Progressive Artists, 73, 106
Bose, Nandalal, 406
Botticelli, Sandro, 29
Brahman, 23, 255
Brahminical, 22-24, 345, 347, 375, 412
*brahmotsava*, 422
Braja Bhāṣā, 35-36
Breckenridge, Carol, 300, 306
*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 189
Bṛhadeśvara, 237
*Bṛhat-Saṁhitā*, 19
Brijamaṇḍal, 421
British Royal Academy, 397
Broacha, Cyrus, 296, 300
Bryson, Norman, 36-38, 99-100, 309, 315, 126
Buber, Martin, 317
Buddha, 4, 18-20, 26-27, 31, 59, 191-92, 110, 254, 258-61, 346, 370, 420
Buddhaghoṣa's *Viśuddhimagga*, 256
Buddhagupta, 260
Buddhism, 24, 256, 261, 414, 420
Buddhist, 26, 31, 59 124, 138, 140, 160, 176, 190, 254, 256, 262, 322, 345-46, 349, 368, 412-13, 416, 419-20,
  art, 370
  *stūpas*, 123, 365, 370
  tantras, 258
Būndī, 167, 170
Burt, T.S., 367
Bush, Vannevar, 315

Cage, John, 321, 323
*cakra*, 191
*Cakravartin*, 259
Calcutta Progressive Artists Group, 405
Cālukyas, 156-57, 201
Calvocoressi, Richard, 69
Cāmuṇḍā, 207-08, 421
Candāval Thakur, 170-71
Candellā, 373
Candraketugarh, 139
Cassirer, Ernst, 31
Castriota, David, 154, 156
Caturbhuja Viṣṇu, 420
*catūrmukha liṅgam*, 423
Caturmukha Vaikuṇṭha, 21
*caturviṁśati mūrtyaḥ*, 21
*catuṣka*, 147
Cāvaṅd Rāgamāla, 161
Cennini, Cennino, 128
Chadwick, Whitney, 90
Chakravarty, Sumita, 298
Champakalakshmi, R., 24, 54
Chatterjee, Ashoke, 387
Chatterjee, Partha, 283, 401
Chatterjee, Ratnabali, 396
Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad, 307
*chattra*, 191
Chavda, S., 404
Chellappa, Fredrick, 113
Chicago, Judy, 92
Chinese Art, 198, 342, 352
  Art History, 352
Cholamandal, 115-16
*citārā*, 162
citation, 57, 167-68, 171
citizenship, 73, 80, 103
*citra*, 353
*Citralakṣaṇa*, 259
*citramīmāṁsā*, 32, 35
*Citrasūtra*, 27, 126, 128, 259, 353
Clark, Kenneth, 37, 378
Clark, T.J., 37, 39, 51
Codrington, KB, 342-44, 348
Coḷa, 24, 153, 265, 268-69, 272, 365, 371, 410, 421, 423
collaborative mode, 91-93, 95, 97
College of Arts and Crafts, 235, 237, 240
colonial, 61, 70-71, 74-75, 77, 84, 125-27, 249, 365, 395-97, 423
  representations, 126
  rule, 109
Company School, 350
connoisseurship, 49-50, 161
Constable, John, 318
consumer culture, 294
Contractor, Hafeez, 78
Coomaraswamy, Ananda K., 18, 20, 22, 24, 26-27, 32, 27-28, 50, 126, 159, 258, 339-40, 343-44, 346-47, 369, 387-88
Corbusier, Le, 177
Correa, Charles, 78
Coward, Harold, 316
crafts, 52, 61, 89, 92, 112-13, 385-89, 391
Cubism, 113, 225
cubist, 235, 239, 351, 407
cultural anthropology, 375

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Cultural History, 37
Culture Studies, 51, 89, 295, 305
Cunningham, Alexander, 368
Curzon, Lord, 338
cyberspace, 311-12
Cézanne, Paul, 37, 41, 42, 108, 238, 239

da, Gerard Cunha, 178
Dadaism, 314, 407
Dahiwale, Girish, 81
*daivajña*, 144-46
*daivam*, 192
Dakshinamoorthy, C., 117
Damisch, Hurbert, 41
Damodaran, K., 117, 230
*daṇḍa*, 145
Danet, Brenda, 394
Dantidurga, 156
*darśanas*, 211
Das Gupta, Pradosh, 108, 405
*Daśarūpaka*, 35
*daśāvatāra*, 155-56, 314
Dāsīaṭṭam, 423
Dasgupta, C.C., 133
Dave, Shanti, 231
De, Biren, 238
Debord, Guy, 317
Deccan, 26, 348, 350, 422
decorative art, 352, 368, 418 423
Dehejia, Harsha, 316
Dehejia, Vidya, 31, 57, 122, 124-25, 127, 129, 319
Delhi, 95, 418
Deogarh, 209
Derrida, Jacques, 38, 222, 279-81
Desai, Devangana, 25, 53, 374-76
Desai, Visakha, 254
Descartes, 100, 103
*desicool*, 295
Deshpande, G.P., 54
*devadāsīs*, 423
*devakoṣṭha*, 268
Devan, M.V., 108-09, 115
*devāṅganās*, 25, 31, 202
Devi Ellaiamman, 272
Devnimori, 202, 208
Dhaky, Madhusudhan, 20, 153-55
Dhamnar, 155-56
Dhanapal, S., 108, 110-12, 143, 229
Dhanika, 35
*dharmacakravartana*, 260
Dhavalikar, 136, 137
Dhere, R.C., 26
Dholavira, 419
*dhūli-citram*, 118
*dhvani*, 35, 324
*Dhvanyāloka*, 324
Dhyānī Buddhas, 258
dialogism, 317
Dickey, Sara, 308-09
Didarganj, 343, 371
Digambara, 375
digital, 312
  aesthetics, 321
  art, 49, 59-60
  media, 315
  technology, 313
*Divyāvadāna*, 191
Dixit, Madhuri, 80, 285, 363-64
Dodiya, Atul, 81, 103
*dohada*, 370
Doss, Anthony, 108-09, 113, 229
Douglas, C., 118
Draviḍa, 157, 420
Dube, Anita, 222-24, 59
Duchamps, Marcel, 314
Dungarpur, 202
Durer, 42
Durgā, 76, 255, 272, 290, 292, 421-22
Dushadh art, 60, 289, 291-92
*dvāraśākhās*, 421

eclecticism, 113, 233
*ekabrāhmaṇa*, 191
Elephanta, 208
Eliade, Mircea, 309
Ellora, 95, 345, 155, 156, 4, 26, 31
epigraphy, 375
erotic, 168, 307, 359-61, 364, 371, 374, 376, 378
  art, 360, 362, 372, 376
  feminine, 61
  Motif, 25
ethnicity, 59-60
ethnological, 340
Existentialism, 36
Expressionist, 235, 407

Farooqi, Anis, 405
Fatehpur Sikri, 178
Fathy, Hassan, 178
fauvism, 407
female
  body, 59, 91, 123, 128, 221, 225, 245-47, 249, 370-72
  form, 235-36
  nudity, 114, 358, 377
  sexuality, 364
feminine, 59, 61, 123, 181, 244, 248, 254, 258, 261, 369, 377
  ideal, 370
  identity, 247
femininity, 181, 185, 248, 262, 297
feminism, 129, 221
feminist, 41, 57, 90, 92, 123, 125, 127, 226, 227, 256, 317
  art history, 51, 122
Fergusson, James, 18, 367
fetishism, 294

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



*Index*

Figuration, 233
Film Studies, 37
fine arts, 51, 61, 333, 337, 339, 350, 352, 368, 386
*flâneur*, 71, 102
Flemish, 342
Focillon, Henri, 3, 351, 16
folk, 231, 292, 306, 307, 113, 116, 53
art, 50, 52-53, 60, 233, 239, 289, 293
formalism, 52-53, 58-59, 107, 111, 116, 118, 174, 198, 237, 238
Foucauldian, 360
Foucault, Michel, 39, 41, 265, 282, 360, 429
Foucher, Alfred, 26
fragmentation, 315
Freud, Sigmund, 30, 42, 222, 299
Fried, Michael, 37
Fry, Roger, 198, 351
Functional Aesthetic, 323
futurism, 407

Gaekwad, Sayaji Rao, 389
Gaitonde, V.S., 76, 231
*Gaja Gamini*, 80, 363, 377
*gaṇa*, 272
Gaṇapati, 307
Ganapathi, V. Sthapati, 176, 269-70, 273
Gāṇapatya, 420
Gāndhāra, 258, 260, 345, 349, 420
Buddhist, 260
Gāndhāran, 208, 338, 340, 345
*gandharva*, 35
Gandhi, 388-91
Gandhi, Indira, 77, 276
Gandhi, Leela, 289
Gaṇeśa, 202, 207, 271, 279, 285, 307, 421, 423
*Gaṇeśa-Caturthī*, 60, 305-06, 308
*Gaṅgā*, 139
Gangadhar, Bal Tilak, 307
*ganitajña*, 144-45
*garbhagṛha*, 416, 423
Gaudi, Antonio, 178
Gaugin, Paul, 236, 113
*gaumukha*, 423
Gayā, 422
gaze, 317, 369, 378
gender, 57-58, 60, 88, 90, 122-23, 125-26, 129, 173-74, 181, 184, 221, 246, 254, 261
German Expressionism, 230
Gestalt, 318
Gestalt Psychology, 39
Ghose, Gopal, 404, 108
Ghosh, A., 153
Giotto, 403
Girdharji I, 212
glance, 315, 317
globalization, 102, 173, 178-79
*godana* paintings, 291-92
Goetz, Herman, 404
Gokul, 217
Goldscheider, Ludwig, 111, 232
Gombrich, E.H., 3, 16, 37-39, 42, 318, 100
Gopinath, P., 114, 239-41
Gopinatha Rao, T.N., 17, 20-21, 23-25
*gopīs*, 167, 217
*gopuram*, 153, 266-69, 272
*goṣṭhī*, 205
Goswamy, B.N., 159, 54
*grāmadevatās*, 232
Gramsci, Antonio, 295
*grantha*, 412
Gray, Basil, 342, 344
Greco-Buddhist art, 340, 345
Greenberg, Clement, 405
Grusin, Richard, 314-15
*gūḍha maṇḍapa*, 416
Guha, Ranajit, 90, 288
Guha-Thakurta Tapti, 55, 61, 279, 284, 341, 346, 397
guild, 201, 203, 205, 262
Gujral, Satish, 405
*guṇas*, 255
Gupta, Shilpa, 85
Gupte, R.S., 258
Gurjara, 156, 201

Habermas, Jürgen, 282
Halebid, 365
Hampi, 156
Haṁsa, 259
Hansen, Kathryn, 307
Hanumān, 271, 363, 421, 423
*hāra*, 194-95
Harappa, 135
Hardy, 196-97, 199
Hargreaves, H., 401-02
Haridasan, K.V., 113, 118, 238, 243
Haripura, 388
Hartley, Keith, 69
Harṣa, 27
Hastings, Warren, 344
Hathigumpha, 191
Hauser, Arnold, 16, 39
Havell, E.B., 34-47, 50, 126, 339-40, 343, 344
Hayles, Katherine, 319
Hebbar, K.K., 404
Hegel, 39, 189, 395
hegemony, 58
Heideggar, Martin, 38
Hellenic, 368
Hellenistic, 345
Hemavatī, 153
Hermaphrodite, 255

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



heterogeneity, 315
heterotopia, 58
high art, 49-51, 53, 55, 81, 85, 91, 233, 272, 289, 363, 394, 397
Hindu, 24, 25, 38, 40, 54, 112, 116, 160, 176, 188, 184, 256, 267, 271-72, 274, 340, 347, 349, 368, 413-14, 416, 423
art, 346, 361
Buddhist, 412
goddesses, 370
identity, 273
Tantras, 258
temples, 370
Hinduism, 26
Hindutva, 74, 276, 282, 285, 308
*hiraṇyagarbha*, 156
Hiriyanna, M., 316
historical avant-garde, 85
Historicism, 36
history painting, 348
Hoysala, 345, 365
humanism, 313
Huntington, Susan, 31, 259
Husain affair, 60, 277
Husain, M.F., 60, 76, 80, 276, 359, 362, 377, 404-05
Hussain, Rummana, 82-83
hybridity, 60, 302, 303
Hyderabad Museum, 339
hypermediacy, 60, 313-15
hypertexts, 321

*icchāśakti*, 255
iconicity, 111-12, 233
iconographic, 28, 50
iconography, 15, 28, 30, 50, 53-54, 58, 61, 77, 142, 171, 198, 203, 232, 235, 237-38, 267, 272, 359, 363-66, 369, 376-77, 420
iconology, 15, 28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 53, 61, 100
identity, 60, 76, 79-81, 83-84, 116, 128, 182, 221, 225, 230-31, 237-39, 243-44, 248, 256, 265, 272, 274, 344, 368
Ikṣvākus, 201
Impressionism, 108, 230, 235
Inamdar, P.A., 154, 203
India Museum, 337, 350
India Society, 342-44
Indian Museum, 338, 342, 413
Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association, 52-53, 89, 106, 223
Indianness, 111, 113, 117, 303, 364, 367
indigenization, 70, 106, 179-80, 184, 232, 269, 406
Indipop, 300
Indragarh, 156
Installation Art, 91
inter-textuality, 294
interactivity, 323
Interface Culture, 312
internationalism, 105-07, 112, 118, 231
internationalist, 111
internet, 321
intertextuality, 60, 211, 214
Irigaray, Luce, 90
Irwin, John, 344
*Itihāsas*, 58
*Itihāsopaniṣad*, 189

Jackson Pollock, 238
Jagannathan, A.S., 113
Jagat, Rana Singh, 162
Jaggayyapeta, 191
Jahangir, 161
Jain, Jyotindra, 53, 93, 290
Jain, Kajri, 308
Jainism, 24, 54, 414
Jaino-Buddhist, 191
Jaipur collection, 339
Jal, Hoshi, 82
Jallandharnath, 168
Jameson, Fredric, 408
Janakiram, P.V., 112
*Janmāṣṭamī*, 420
Jaswant Singh, 162, 166
*Jātaka*, 4, 34, 192, 388
*jaṭāmukuṭa*, 26
*jīvātman*, 262
Jaykar, Pupul, 290
Jecob, Anila, 115
Jehāngīrī, 192, 350
*jijñāsā*, 319
Joanna Williams, 260
Jodhpur, 57-58, 165-68
Jogeswari, 208
*Joḍa Kalaśa*, 195
Joseph Campbell, 256
Joshi, Murli Manohar, 298
*Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 89-90, 54
*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 194-95
Juneja, Monica, 278-79
*jyotirliṅgas*, 422

Kalacūris, 201
*kaḷam*, 232, 239
*kalamkārī*, 232
Kalhana, 189
Kālī, 76, 237, 272, 365
Kalibangan, 135
Kālidāsa, 27, 35
Kalighat, 174
Kallat, Jitish, 81
*kāma-kalā yantra*, 375
Kāmadeva, 139

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Kāmākṣī Amman, 269
*Kāmasūtra*, 25, 374
*Kāmikāgama*, 19
Kanchipuram, 269
Kandarīya-Mahādeva, 360
Kandinsky, 239, 406
Kaniṣka, 259, 419
Kanniappan, S., 112
Kant, 102, 400
Kapadvanj, 156
Kāpālikas, 375
Kaplan, Ann. E., 299
Kapur, Geeta, 55-56, 69, 222, 400, 407
*kārkhānā*, 162
*karmakāra*, 144, 146
*karmāntikas*, 143, 146
*karmayogī*, 4
*karmī*, 144-45
*karmin*, 205
Karnāṭa, 290
*kāru*, 144
*kāruka*, 144
Karunanidhi, M., 269-70
Kāśī Viśveśvara, 155, 422
*Kāśyapa-Saṁhitā*, 146
*Kāśyapaśilpa*, 144
Kathakali, 240
Kathiawad, 201
Kaulas, 375
Kauṭilya, 146, 189, 192
Kausambi, 139
*kavi-pratibhā*, 32
*kavi-vyāpāra*, 32
*Kāvyamīmāṁsā*, 143
Kennedy, Col. Vans, 17
Khajuraho, 25, 358-63, 365, 367-69, 371-76
Khakhar, Bhupen, 81
*khanakans*, 143
Khandagiri-Udaigiri, 191
Khandalawala, Karl, 159, 160, 282
Kharavela, Ceta, 190-91
King Bhoja, 142
King Padam, 165, 167, 171
*kinnarīs*, 370
*kīrtanas*, 211
*kīrtimukha*, 266, 273
*kitābkhānās*, 160
kitschiness, 305
Klee, Paul, 111, 113
Kleinbauer, 154
Klingender, Francis, 39
*koḷam*, 232
Kolleri, Valsan, 118
Konark, 365, 367, 369
Kondagaon, 92, 94, 96-97
Kondapur, 137
Koṭā, 422
*Kotai*, 156
Koteshvara, 202
Kottam, Valluvar, 267
Kotyarka, 202
*krakacha*, 147
Kramrisch, Stella, 20, 22-23, 26, 27, 31, 38, 57, 126, 133-36, 145, 196, 260-61, 322, 369, 370, 373
Krauss, Rosalind, 102
Krishnan, M.V., 108
Kristeva, Julia, 41-42, 221-222, 226
Kṛṣṇa, 167-71, 211, 217-19, 273, 290, 410, 420, 421-22
*Kṛṣṇalīlā*, 4, 36, 414, 422
Kṣatrapas, 201, 208
Kshemendra, 143
Kudallur, Achutan, 118, 240
Kukkanur, 155, 195
*kula kuṇḍalinī*, 258
Kuleśa, 258
Kulkarni, K.S., 231
Kumar, Ram, 231
Kumbakonam, 269
*kumbhakāra*, 140
Kunhiraman, Kanai, 112
Kuṣāṇa, 27, 133, 136, 138-40, 201, 259-61, 345, 349, 419-20
Kuṣāṇa-Mathurā, 209, 254, 338, 346
*kūṭas*, 194
*Kūṭina*, 194, 195
*Kuṭṭanīmata*, 143
*Kutti*, 176

Lacan, 222, 317
Lajjā Gourī, 26, 365
*lakṣaṇa*, 34-35, 191, 259
Lakṣmaṇa, 18, 360
Lakṣmī, 35, 255, 272, 308, 365
Lalitha, K., 90
Lanham, Richard, 313
Lannoy, Richard, 322
Laocoon, 317
*latā*, 195
Lāṭa, 202
Lawrence, T.B., 339
Lepākṣi, 110, 236, 423
Levi, Claude Strauss, 315
Levine, Lawrence, 307
linear perspective, 313
*liṅga*, 234
Liṅgarāja, 367
*Liṅgodbhavamūrti*, 20
Linguistics, 31, 37, 41
Linnaean, 335
Literary Criticism, 37, 42
Lokeśvara, 420
*lokottara* Buddha, 261
Low Art, 85, 91, 289
Ludwig Goldscheider, 110
Lukacs, George, 40

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Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri



Madhubani, 240, 288
art, 292
Madhyadeśa, 209
Madras Art Movement, 230-31, 235-39, 241
Madras School of Arts and Crafts, 229
Madurai, 269, 422
*magnum opus*, 357
Magritte, 38
Mahā-Gurjara, 153
Mahā-Maru, 153
*Mahābhārata*, 290
*mahābhiniṣkramaṇa*, 420
*Mahākūṭa*, 155
Mahāmeghavāhana, 191
*mahāmudrā*, 258
*Mahāsāṅghikas*, 261
*Mahāśivarātri*, 376
Mahāyāna, 254, 258
Mahishasura, 76
Mainardi, Patricia, 92
*maithuna*, 361, 369, 373, 377
Maitraka, 201
*mālādhara*, 35
Malagaon, 202
Malani, Nalini, 83
male bodies, 59, 123-24
Male, Emile, 28-29
Malwa, 142, 156-57, 190
Mamallapuram, 176, 270
Man Singh, 165-66, 168-71
*maṇḍala*, 255
*maṇḍapam*, 153, 416, 423
Mandasor, 155, 208
*maṇḍovara*, 156, 421
*maṅgala*, 211
Mannerism, 39
Mansur, 350
*Manusmṛti*, 127, 144, 256
Manyakheda, 155
Margritte, Rene, 314
Martin, Agnes, 224
Marxist, 31, 38-41, 189
masculine, 59, 254, 261-62
masquerade, 83-85
Mataṅgeśvara, 376
Mathura, 139, 204-05, 212, 258-61, 345, 349, 366, 368-71, 418
Mathura-Sarnath, 259-60, 262
Matisse, Henri, 236, 239, 351, 403
Matnar, 95
Mātṛkās, 28, 202-03, 206-08
*Matsya Purāṇa*, 19
Mauryan, 136, 139, 201, 204, 346, 414, 419-20
*Mayamatam*, 142-46
Mehta, Tyeb, 76
Meister, Michael, 21
metaphor, 166, 168, 225-26, 238, 222
Mewar, 57, 59, 159-160, 162, 211-13
School, 161-62
Michelangelo, 29, 42, 177
*mīmāṁsakas*, 33-34
Mimesis, 311
minimalism, 225, 234
Mirashi, V.V., 191
Misra, R.N., 22, 54, 204
Mitchell, W.J.T., 35, 42
Mithila art, 288-91
*mithuna*, 361, 369, 372, 373
modernism, 36, 401
Modhera, 156
Modigalani, 403
Mohamed, Khalid, 80
Mohamedi, Nasreen, 222-26, 59
Mohan, 175
Mohenjo-Daro, 135
Monababies, 314
Monalisa, 314
Mondrian, Piet, 224-25, 406
Monet, 238
Monier-Williams, 387
Mount Abu, 366
MTV, 49, 60, 79, 294-303
Mughal, 54, 57, 161, 339-40, 349-51, 413, 418, 423
Mughal-Islamic, 423
*mukha maṇḍapa*, 268
Mukhaliṅgam, 410
Mukherjee, Ajit, 25
Mukherjee, Sailoz, 404-05
Mukherjee, Sushil Kumar, 108
Mukherji, Meera, 89
Mukhopadhyay, Kausik, 85
*mūlādhāra cakra*, 258
Müller, Max, 18, 344
multi-sequentially, 320
Mulvey, Laura, 297
Munro, Thomas, 16
Munuswamy, 117
Munuswamy, L., 108-09, 113, 229-30, 234-36, 239, 241
Muralidharan, K., 118
museology, 396, 406
museums, 61, 89, 202, 92, 95, 337-38, 371, 400-02, 403, 410-11, 421
Mushika Nagari, 190, 191
Muthaiyah *sthapati*, 268-69

*nāda*, 314, 316
Nadkarni, Dyaneshwar, 276, 278, 283
*nāga*, 35
*nāgakanyās*, 114
*nāgara*, 153, 155-57, 273, 420

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*Index*


Nāgeśvara, 195
*nāginīs*, 370
Nagnajit, 259
Nahapana, 191
Naidu, Reddappa, 109, 113, 229
Naina Dalal, 4
Nainsukh, 350
Nair, Surendran, 103
Naiyāyika, 35
Nālayiradivyaprabandham, 19
Nalpar, 96
Nanappā, 156
Nandagopal, S., 113
Nandhan, P.S., 113
Naneghat, 190-91
Nanjappa, Rani, 113
Narayan, Badri, 113
Narayana, Sri Guru, 245
Narayanan, Akkitam, 113, 243
narrativity, 312, 317
Nasik, 137-38
Naṭarāja, 20, 28
Nandī, 153, 273, 422
*naṭas*, 143
Natesan, Shibu, 103
Nāth *sampradāya*, 168-69
Nāth *yogī*, 171
Nāthadwārā, 422
National Museum, 341, 346-48, 406, 410-11
native, 113
nativism, 24, 105, 107, 109, 111, 119-14, 118, 232-33
naturalism, 166, 348
*Nāṭya Śāstra*, 20
Navajo Indian, 255
Navaliṅga, 155
Nāyaka, 153, 265, 268-69, 272
Nead, Lynda, 377-78
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 396, 401-02, 404
Neo Tantra, 405, 407-08
neo-classicism, 175
Neo-Platonism, 29
Neo-Tāntric, 238
net.art, 311, 317, 319, 323
Net.art Aesthetics, 320
Newton Affair, 282
Newton, Francis Souza, 73, 76
Nirukta, 189
Nisardin, 161
*Niṣpannayogāvalī*, 26
Niti Hapi, 255
Nivedita, Sister, 50
Nochlin, Linda, 51
Nolambas, 153
Nrityagram, 178
*nṛkara*, 144
*nṛtya*, 20
*nṛtya mūrtis*, 20
nude, 123, 237, 248, 358, 362, 365, 366, 371, 372, 377-78
nude Sarasvatī, 366

Oedipus, 298
O'Flaherty, Wendy, 255
Oguibe, Olu, 69
Oinwārā, 290
Oriental Art, 343
orientalist, 125, 265, 268
ornamental, 373

Padamsee, Akbar, 76, 231
*Padmāsana*, 179, 259
Padmini, T.K., 59, 113-14, 243-44, 247, 249
Pahari, 54, 159, 351
Pai, Laxman, 113
Pal, Pratapaditya, 27
Pāla, 420
  Buddhist, 262
  Sena, 345
Palaniappan, Rm., 118
Pallava, 157, 201, 265, 268-69, 412
Pallava Śaivite, 24
*Pañcarātra*, 19
*Pañcarātrāgama*, 21
Pandeya, R.C., 316
Pāṇḍya, 269
Panicker, Jayapala, 115
Paniker, K.C.S., 109-13, 115-18, 229, 232, 234-35, 237, 239-40, 243-44
Pāṇini, 19
Panofsky, Erwin, 3, 16, 21, 28-30, 37
Paramāra, 421
Paramasivam, S., 113
*paramātman*, 262
Parekh, Swapan, 84
Parel, 208
Parimoo, Gauri Krishnan, 61
Parimoo, Ratan, 1, 2, 4, 159, 318, 417
Parker, Rozsika, 90, 92
parody, 314, 105
Parthians, 138
Pārvatī, 28, 155, 361, 365, 376
Pascal, 101
pastiche, 53, 78, 166, 177
Patañjali, 19, 33
*patāka*, 191
Pataliputra, 190
Patna, 368
Patricia Leighton, 233
patronage, 53, 57, 58, 60, 168-69, 116, 124, 153, 173-74, 209, 230, 262, 272
Pattadakkal, 155, 345
Patwardhan, Anand, 82


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Patwardhan, Sudhir, 76
performing arts, 418
Persian art, 342
Perumal, P., 118
Phenomenology, 36
photography, 61, 70, 77, 82-84, 101-03, 313-14, 426-31, 433
Picasso, Pablo, 278, 110
*picchavai*, 410, 422
Pilla Gudi, 95-96
Pinney, Christopher, 277, 294, 306
pluralism, 202, 58
Podro, Michael, 36
Pollock, Griselda, 90, 92, 51
popular art, 49-51, 60, 85, 174, 102, 271, 294, 307, 314, 361-62, 376
  culture, 80-81, 85, 221, 226, 295, 305-07
Porada, Edith, 156
pornographic, 377
post-colonial, 231
post-Gupta, 58, 153, 202, 258, 345, 410, 412, 420
Post-Impressionism, 108, 110, 230, 235
post-Mauryan, 204
post-modern, 36, 76, 78, 80, 85, 103, 240, 302, 312
post-Mughal, 423
post-structuralism, 36, 52, 61, 125-26
post-Vedic, 204
postcolonial, 52, 75, 78, 103, 243-44, 265, 394
Prabhakar, P.K., 109
Prabhakaravardhana, 143
*prajñā*, 254, 258
*prajñāpāramitā*, 258
Prakash, Anand, 175-76, 178, 180, 183
*prakṛti*, 118, 237, 255, 361, 374
*prapañca*, 255
Prasad, Madhava, 303
*prāsādas*, 146
*pratibhā*, 33, 57, 161-62
Pratihāras, 155-56
*pratikṛti*, 19
pre-Akbari, 162
pre-colonial, 57, 122, 394-95
pre-Gupta, 201
pre-Mauryan, 204
pre-Pāla, 262
Preziosi, Donald, 37, 41, 52, 396-97
primitivism, 111-13, 113, 118, 134, 233, 241
Progressive Artists Group, 76, 278, 230
public, 294
  culture, 295, 306-07, 116
  space, 174
  Sphere, 81, 85
Punja, Shobita, 375-76
*purajña*, 144
Purāṇas, 17, 58, 192, 196
*purāṇajña*, 145
Purāṇic, 19, 25, 127
Purāvṛttas, 58
*puruṣa*, 118, 237, 255, 361, 374
Pushpamala, N., 84, 226
Pushtimargi, 420
Pushyamitra Shunga, 190
*puṣpapoṭika*, 266, 268, 270, 273
*puṣṭakāras*, 140
*Puṣṭimārga*, 168-71
*Puṣṭimārgīs*, 422

Radcliffe, Carol Bolon, 387
Rādhā, 167-68, 218-19
Raituram, 93
Raj, Susai, 113
Raja Ravi Varma, 244-49, 272, 278, 294, 404
Raja, A.C.K., 113-14
Raja Bhoja, 373
Raja, K., 318
Raja, Kunjunni, 33
Rājā Salheśa, 291
Rajadhyaksha, Ashish, 56, 69, 284
Rajagopal, 283-85
Rajashekhara, 143
Rājasthānī, 192
*Rājataraṅgiṇī*, 189
Rājpūt, 340, 348, 350, 418, 423
  painting, 165
Rāma, 290, 346, 18
Rāma-yantra, 420
Ramanuja, 420
Ramanujam, K., 113-15, 243
*Rāmāyaṇa*, 18, 143, 147, 161, 283-84, 290, 414, 422
Rāmeśvara, 155
Rana Jagat Singh I, 211-212
Rānak Devī, 156
Raṅganātha Temple at Srirangam, 153
Rānīgañj, 402
Rāṇo Satakarni, 191
Raphael, 336
*rāsa-līlā*, 170
*rasa-śāstra*, 28, 324
*rasadhvani*, 323-24
*rasasūtra*, 33
*rasika*, 316
Rāṣṭrakūṭa, 153, 155-57
Rāvaṇa, 35, 147
Ray, Satyajit, 282
Ray, Sugata, 59
Raza, S.H., 76
*Razmnāmā*, 339
realism, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, 84, 108, 112, 117, 226, 245, 313,

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368, 372
Reddappa, M. Naidu, 111
regional, 118, 197, 232, 241
culture, 231, 241
histories, 105-07
identity, 113, 347
modern, 59, 107, 232, 237, 241
Modern: Nativism, 109
modernism, 229
national, 241
styles, 58
local, 105-06
regionalism, 199, 201, 231, 106
Renaissance, 123-24, 128, 178, 225, 313, 322, 334, 335-36, 340, 368, 377
representation, 51, 76, 80-81, 85, 91-92, 100-02, 122-25, 127-29, 222, 224, 238, 241, 245, 253-54, 261, 314, 317, 358, 375
Revivalism, 4, 230
Riegl, Alois, 31, 39
Rocher, Ludo, 386
Roda, 57, 153-57, 202
Rodin, Auguste, 107, 177, 406-07
rowdysheet, 426-27, 429, 431, 433
Roy, Jamini, 109, 111, 403-04
Roy, Rammohun, 396
Roy Chowdhury, 108
Roy Chowdhury, Debi Prosad, 107
Royal Academy of Arts, 341-42, 347
Rūḍha, 33
Rudra, 256
Rummana Hussain, 223
Rūpa-maṇḍana, 19
*rūpakāra*, 205
*rūpam*, 396
Rushdie, Salman, 364

*śabda*, 33, 316, 319
*śabda-tattva*, 320
Sadanandan, V.M., 114
*Sādhanamālā* II, 26
Sahibdin, 161-62
*sahiṣṇutā*, 191
Said, Edward W., 90, 128, 302
Saindhava Maitraka, 156
St. Anthony, 174
Śaivism, 19-20, 170-71, 203, 206-08, 267, 271, 347, 420, 422
Śakas, 138, 191
*sakhī*, 218
Śakra, 146
Śākta, 420
Śākta Tantricism, 258
*śakti*, 34, 207, 235, 256, 258
*śaktis*, 272, 361
Śakuntalā, 344
Śākyamuni Buddha, 258
*śālā*, 194-95, 422
*śālabhañjikās*, 370, 419
*śālagrāma śilā*, 135
Samant, Sharmila, 85
*Samarāṅgana-Sūtradhāra*, 142-44, 146, 259
Sambandar, 421
*saṁhatyakārita*, 35
*saṁsarga*, 34
Samudragupta, 419
Sanchi, 95, 204, 344, 369-71, 419
*sandhi-kṣetra*, 375
*sandhyā bhāṣā*, 375, 377
Saṅgameśvara, 155
Sangari, Kumkum, 90
Saṅkarṣaṇa, 21
*Sāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, 189
*sannidhi*, 34
Sanskrit, 27, 28, 32, 33, 42
Santhanaraj, A.P., 108-09, 113, 117, 229, 234, 240
Santibai, 93
Santosh, G.R., 238
*Saptamātṛkā*, 31
Śarabha, 24
Saraladevi, 135
Sarasvatī, 255, 272, 276, 279-81, 285, 362, 364-65, 377
Sarkar, Sumit, 305
Sarnath, 259-62, 368
Buddha, 260
Museum, 261
Mathura, 261
Sarvāstivāda, 261
*śāstravids*, 143
Satakarni, 191
Śatarudrīya, 21, 28
Sātavāhana, 133, 136-37, 189, 191, 201, 345
Satavahana, Simuka, 190
*Satsai*, 35
*saundarya*, 396
Saurashtra, 190, 201-02
Saurya, 420
Saussure, Ferdinand De, 33
*śayana*, 211
Schapiro, Meyer, 37, 38, 42
Schastok, Sara L., 207
Sehgal, Amarnath, 405
semiotics, 30, 61, 309
Sen, Parithosh, 108
Sena, 420
Senathipathy, M., 113, 118
Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu, 4, 31, 420, 423
sexuality, 59, 90, 117, 181, 246, 247, 249, 254-55, 358-59, 370, 372
Shah, Haku, 135
Shah, U.P., 154
Shah, Umakant, 27
Shahani, Kumar, 77
Shamalaji, 58, 202-03, 205-08
Shankararya, 195
Shantiniketan, 350

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Sharma, R.S., 138, 259
Sheeba Chachi, 223
Sheikh, Gulammohammed, 1, 55, 107
Sheikh, Nilima, 226
Sher-Gil, Amrita, 224, 403-04
Sheth, Ketaki, 83
Shetty, Sudarshan, 85
Shri Devi Ellaiamman Alayam, 272
signatures, 57, 60, 101, 241
Sihare, L.P., 401, 406-07
Sikhism, 424
Silpi Gram, 92-94, 96
*Śilapaddikāram*, 270
*Śilpa*, 19, 142, 147, 204-05, 259, 267, 270-71, 386-87
*Śilpa Prakāśa*, 124, 373
*Śilpa Śāstras*, 57, 122, 128, 144-45, 176, 353
*śilpa śāstrīs*, 33, 173
*śilpajña*, 144, 146
*śilpakāras*, 143
*Śilparatna*, 19, 143, 146
*śilpī*, 146, 205-06
*śilpinīs*, 125, 143-44, 386-87
simulacrum, 79, 81, 84
simulation, 311
Simultaneity, 320
Singh, Dayanita, 84
Singh, Raghubir, 77
Sircar, Ajanta, 297
Sircar, D.C., 256
Sister Nivedita, 50, 414
Sītā, 18, 362, 364, 377
Sittanavassal, 236
Śiva, 20-21, 27-28, 169, 202, 207, 256, 267, 272, 346, 361, 376, 422
*Śiva Purāṇa*, 376
*śivaliṅga*, 135
Sivaramamurti, C., 20-21, 27-28, 32, 369
Solaṅkī, 156, 157
Somaskanda, 421, 423
Sompura, Kantilal, 20
Souza, F.N., 113
spectatorship, 122-23
*sphoṭa*, 316, 60
*sphoṭavāda*, 316
spirituality, 262, 368
Spivak, G.C., 90
*śrāddha*, 422
Sreenivasulu, K., 112
Śrī Lakṣmī, 22, 24
Śrī Nāthjī, 212, 422
Śrīsamāja, 258
Śrīvaiṣṇava, 420
Sri Satakarni, 190-91
Srirangam, 153, 422
Srivatsan, A., 270
Srivatsan, R., 61
*śrī yantra*, 255
Stalbaum, Brett, 323
*sthapati*, Muthaiya, 142-47, 156, 270-74
*sthapatis*, 143, 266-68
Structuralism, 36
Strzygowski, Joseph, 37
Stuart, Charles, 397
style, 53-54, 108, 134, 155, 157, 201, 209, 369
stylistic analysis, 142, 203
subjectivity, 73, 81, 105, 123, 194, 197, 221, 226, 244-46, 248-49, 268, 335
Subramanyan, K.G., 89
Sufism, 423
*śukanāsā*, 421
*sukhāsana mūrtis*, 20
*Śukranīti*, 189
Sultan Ali, J., 112
Sun Temple, 156, 367
Sundaram, Vivan, 82-83
*sundarī*, 423
Śuṅga, 136, 139, 201, 419
  Kaṇva, 137
  Sātavāhana, 191
*śūnyata*, 258, 322
*Suprabhedāgama*, 19
*Sūraj Prakāśa*, 165, 170
*surāsundarīs*, 373, 377
Surendradranath, P.B., 118
Surrealism, 42, 102, 407
Sūrsāgar, 36, 59, 211-17
Sūrya, 190
*sūtradhāra*, 205, 207, 209, 142, 144-46
*sūtragrāhin*, 144-45
*svabhāvokti*, 32
*svarūpa*, 314
Swaminathan, J., 52-53, 93, 405
Swaraj, 340
symbolic, 102, 317, 368, 373, 375
symbolic capital, 335
symbolism, 58, 238, 359, 367, 369-70, 376

Tagore, Abanindranath, 4, 50, 107, 406
Tagore, Gaganendranath, 4, 230, 403-04, 407
Tagore, Rabindranath, 4, 50, 315, 350, 404, 407
Taine, Hippolyte, 39
*Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 143
*takṣaka*, 144-47
*tāla*, 423
Tamil, 24
Tanjore, 110
Tantra, 25

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Tāntric, 25, 116, 241, 375
  Kāpālikas, 375
  *maṇḍalas*, 238
  philosophy, 237
  rituals, 237
  symbolism, 118
*tapas*, 256
Taranāth, 205
*tātparya śakti*, 34-35
Tendulkar, Vijay, 73
Thanjavur, 237
Thapar, Romila, 387
Tharu, Susie, 90, 401
Theravāda Buddhist, 256
Theyyam, 112
Thiruchirappalli Gaṅgādhara, 192
Thiruvalluvar, 267, 269-70
Thiruvananthapuram, 117
Thozur, Vasudha, 118
Tintoi, 202, 207
Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 273
Tomii, Reiko, 69
Tondainadu, 157
Toynbee, 189
traditional art historical methodologies, 49
transcendental, 368
tribal, 50, 52, 231, 306, 411
  art, 289, 292, 53
*tribhaṅga*, 261
*triratna*, 259
Tuli, Neville, 105-06
Turkle, Sherry, 312

Uberoi, Patricia, 308
*udāharaṇas*, 192
Udaigiri, 209
Udaipur, 161, 211
Ugra-Cāmuṇḍā, 207
Ujjain, 156
urban
  art, 93
  culture, 92
Ushavadata, 191
Uttānapāda, Aditi, 26
*Uttara-Rāma-Carita*, 18
*utthāpya-ākāṅkṣā*, 319

Vadnagar, 202
*vāhanas*, 207, 422
Vaikhānasa Āgama, 19
Vaiṣṇavism, 4, 19, 21, 24, 31, 36, 271, 347, 420, 422
Vajrayāna Buddhism, 26-27, 254
*vākyārtha*, 34
Vallabhacharya, 36, 211
Vallabhi, 201
Valluvar, 267
Van Eycy, Jan, 30
Van der Weyden, Roger, 30
Van Gogh Vincent, 38, 108, 110, 403
Varadarajan, R., 113, 118
Vārāṇasī, 422
*vardhaki*, 143-46
*varṇa*, 391
*vastu*, 178
Vāstu Puruṣa, 269
*Vāstu Śāstras*, 144, 196
Vasudev, S.G., 113-15, 243
Vasudevan, K.M. Namboodiri, 108
Vasudevan, Ravi, 282
Vedānta, 60, 414
Vedas, 344
Velazquez, Diego, 39
Venkatapathy, D., 113, 118
Venturi, Lionello, 36
*vesara*, 157, 420
*vibhava*, 21
Vidarbha, 209
*vidhijña*, 144-45
Vidisha, 95, 421
*vidyās*, 205
Vienna School of Art History, 32
Vijayanagara, 153, 265, 268-69, 421
*vijñānin*, 205
*vikalpa*, 33
Vikramāditya II, 156
*vimāna*, 268, 270, 273
Vincent Van Gogh, 108, 38
Vinci, Da, Leonardo, 314
*Vīra Vinoda*, 211
Virilio, Paul, 321
virtual reality, 313
Viṣṇu, 21, 24, 35, 54, 135, 169, 192, 255, 272, 290, 314, 346
*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 256
Viṣṇu Viśvarūpas, 205
Viṣṇu-Gaṇeśa, 308
*Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 19, 27, 126, 259, 353
visual
  arts, 317, 51
  culture, 59-60, 69-70, 72, 80-82, 85, 127, 268, 294, 305, 378
  immediacy, 317
  epresentation, 313
visuality, 49, 56, 59, 70, 72, 122, 125-26, 261, 294, 303
Viśvakarman, 197, 270-71
Viśwanāthan Sthapati, 272
Viswanathan, V., 113-15, 237-41, 243, 360
*vitāna*, 147
voyeurism, 294, 297, 317, 371-72, 377
Vrindavan, 217
*vyākhyāna*, 260
*vyāla*, 417, 421
*vyāli*, 273
*vyañjana*, 34, 324
*vyāpāra*, 32

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*vyūhavāda*, 21

Wadhwan, 156
Warburg, Aby, 29, 39
Wardha Resolution, 385, 388, 389, 391
Warhol, Andy, 38, 314
Web
  art, 317
  narrativity, 60, 312, 319-20, 324
Wilkinson, R.W., 342
William, Sir Jones, 344
Williams, Joanna, 201, 259
Williams, Raymond, 307, 40
Wolff, Janet, 215, 253
Wolfflin, Heinrich, 3, 17, 30-31, 351

*yajamāna*, 146
*Yajurveda*, 28
*yakṣa*, 22, 24, 259, 262
*yakṣīs*, 123-24, 248, 365, 369-71
Yali, 422
Yamunā, 139
*yantras*, 232, 234, 237-39
Yāska, 19, 189
Yaśodā, 217-18
*yaugika*, 33
*yoga*, 414
  *sādhanā*, 258
  *rūḍha*, 33
*yogī*, 256
yogic, 346
*yogyatā*, 34
*yoni*, 234

Zimmer, Heinrich, 20

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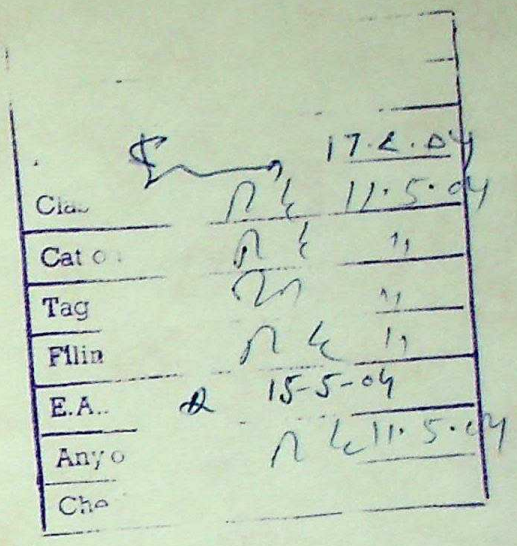


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